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Degeneration and Revolution

*Radical Cultural Politics and the Body in
Weimar Germany*

By

Robert Heynen



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For Emily



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List of Abbreviations

AIZ	<i>Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung</i> (Workers' Illustrated Newspaper)
AF	<i>Arbeiter-Fotograf</i> (Worker-Photographer newspaper)
BDÄ	<i>Bund Deutscher Ärztinnen</i> (Federation of German Women Doctors)
BdF	<i>Bund deutscher Frauenvereine</i> (Federation of Women's Associations)
BfMS	<i>Bund für Mutterschutz und Sexualreform</i> (League for the Protection of Mothers and Sexual Reform)
BPRS	<i>Bund Proletarisch-revolutionärer Schriftsteller</i> (League of Proletarian-Revolutionary Writers)
Bufa	<i>Bild- und Filmamt</i> (Film and Photography Office)
DÄVB	<i>Deutscher Ärztenvereinsbund</i> (German Medical Association)
DDP	<i>Deutsche Demokratische Partei</i> (German Democratic Party)
DGBG	<i>Deutsche Gesellschaft zur Bekämpfung der Geschlechtskrankheiten</i> (German Society to Combat Venereal Disease)
DKG	<i>Deutsche Kolonialgesellschaft</i> (German Colonial Society)
DLG	<i>Deutschen Lichtbild Gesellschaft</i>
DNVP	<i>Deutschnationale Volkspartei</i> (German National People's Party)
DVLP	<i>Deutsche Vaterlandspartei</i> (German Fatherland Party)
DVP	<i>Deutsche Volkspartei</i> (German People's Party)
EPM	<i>Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts</i>
FKK	<i>Freikörperkultur</i>
IAH	<i>Internationale Arbeiterhilfe</i> (International Workers' Aid)
KAPD	<i>Kommunistische Arbeiter Partei Deutschlands</i> (Communist Workers' Party of Germany)
KPD	<i>Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands</i> (Communist Party of Germany)
RAR	<i>Revolutionärer Arbeiterrat</i> (Revolutionary Workers' Council)
RFB	<i>Roter Frontkämpferbund</i> (Red Front Fighters' League)
RGBG	<i>Reichsgesetz zur Bekämpfung der Geschlechtskrankheiten</i> (Federal Law to Combat Venereal Disease)
RRR	<i>Revue Roter Rummel</i> (Red Riot [or Revel] Review)
SBK	<i>Selbsthilfebund der Körperbehinderten</i> (Self-Help League of the Physically Disabled)
SPD	<i>Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands</i> (Social Democratic Party of Germany)
STIS	sexually-transmitted infections

Ufa	<i>Universum Film AG</i>
USPD	<i>Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands</i> (Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany)
VSÄ	<i>Verein Sozialistischer Ärzte</i> (Association of Socialist Physicians)

Introduction: Weimar Germany and the Cultures of Capitalist Modernity

The current amazement that the things we are experiencing are ‘still’ possible in the twentieth century is *not* philosophical. This amazement is not the beginning of knowledge – unless it is the knowledge that the view of history which gives rise to it is untenable.

WALTER BENJAMIN¹

1.1 Rethinking Weimar History

In 1892 Max Nordau published *Degeneration*, a book that crystallised a growing concern with the impact of modern life upon the body. Drawing on a range of recent work in criminology and other fields, he argued that individual and social bodies were threatened by new dangers rooted in both biology and society, dangers that, as his description of ‘degenerates’ suggests, were proliferating in many directions:

Degenerates are not always criminals, prostitutes, anarchists, and pronounced lunatics; they are often authors and artists. These, however, manifest the same mental characteristics, and for the most part, the same somatic features, as the members of the above-mentioned anthropological family, who satisfy their unhealthy impulses with the knife of the assassin or the bomb of the dynamiter, instead of with the pen and pencil.²

Nordau’s typology of the degenerate presents us with a typical and influential account of what was a rapidly growing concern in late nineteenth-century Europe.³ Degeneracy is promiscuous (as with prostitutes), dangerous (criminals), and unstable (lunatics). It combines somatic and psychological characteristics, with bodies acting as texts from which degeneracy can be

1 ‘Theses on the Philosophy of History’ in Benjamin 1968, p. 257.

2 Nordau 1993, p. v.

3 Histories of the idea of degeneration include Chamberlin and Gilman 1985; Clemons 1998; Ewen & Ewen 2006; Greenslade 1994; Mayer 1982; Pick 1989; Schuller 1999.

read. Together, individual instances of degeneracy constitute both symptoms and causes of a broader social degeneration, an often contradictory logic of particular and whole that was especially evident in relation to the two interconnected areas that form the focus of this book: art and culture (the author and the artist), and radical politics (the anarchic dynamiter). The scale of the threat meant that, for Nordau, any 'healthy' society must deal ruthlessly with the degenerate. 'The struggle against the anti-social ego-maniac, his expulsion from the social body, are necessary functions of the latter [a healthy society]; and if it is not capable of accomplishing it, it is a sign of waning vital power or serious ailment'.⁴

This book is about many of the figures that Nordau identifies as degenerate: prostitutes, criminals, anarchists, lunatics, and artists all figure prominently in what follows. As the title of the book suggests, what I am especially interested in is the embodied politics of degeneration that drew on these figures, the relationship of degeneration to radical or revolutionary politics, and the ways in which this relationship shaped the culture of the Weimar period in Germany. That period, which spanned the years between the end of the First World War in 1918 and the Nazi seizure of power in 1933, gave rise to a host of movements, in both the political and the cultural spheres, that sought to do precisely what Nordau feared: disrupt the dominant order. These movements sought social change in various ways, a spectrum that encompassed reformers, radicals, and revolutionaries. They included social democrats, anarchists, and communists, as well as feminists, homosexual and disability rights activists, anti-imperialists, and others who targeted directly the repressive politics of degeneration. Many artists, new media producers, and cultural critics joined these movements, and also developed radical approaches to art and culture that challenged older aesthetic practices and that, in many cases, were expressly conceived of as part of radical or revolutionary political struggles.

Nordau and other early theorists of degeneration like Cesare Lombroso conceived of the threat of political and cultural radicalism in terms of a quasi-biological pathology – a pathology that marked the social body as sick and in need of therapeutic intervention. Over the course of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Europe, this desire to frame social and political questions through ideas of degeneration gained a wide resonance. In Germany, the experience of the First World War heightened the sense for many Germans that modern society was in crisis. The aftermath of the War saw the overthrow of the imperial order, a revolutionary upsurge that was violently repressed, and the subsequent formation of a republic, developments that, for some,

4 Nordau 1993, p. 266.

cemented the sense of crisis. It was not only conservatives who feared what was happening; liberals and even social democrats also often read the crisis as a manifestation of a broader degeneration in which the post-War revolutionary movements appeared as symptoms of a sickness in the social body.

This response was captured with venomous force in Max Glass's 1919 anti-Bolshevik novel *Humanity Unleashed*. In a book that pushed boundaries in terms of its violence, a doctor identifies the chaos unleashed by a fictionalised Spartacist uprising in the language of degeneration: '[e]very revolution is a metabolic disease'.⁵ Reinforcing that message is the depiction of degenerate criminals and prostitutes among the Spartacist forces who viciously attack ordinary Germans. These revolutionaries too parrot the language of degeneration, with one extolling the Russian Revolution: '[t]he West is made sick by its culture, the East is healthy'.⁶ For Glass, however, this is a false belief. True health is not found in the East, but in the novel's hero, an engineer who promotes an evolutionary progressivism through hard work. Far from conservative, the politics of the book promoted a resolutely counter-revolutionary liberalism. Later made into a popular film, *Humanity Unleashed* stood as one of the most virulent depictions of the revolutionary left as a pathological threat.⁷

That people across the political spectrum drew on theories of degeneration is important to keep in mind given the current association of these ideas with the radical right. Indeed, nineteenth-century conceptions of degeneration in Germany had tended to be expressions of liberal and social Darwinist politics. Nordau himself was a liberal, while Rudolf Virchow – a prominent pathologist who was the founding figure in German eugenics and social hygiene – conceived of the social body as a 'cell state' in which individual cells were 'citizens', a fundamentally liberal analogy.⁸ Conservatives, liberals, and even social democrats in Weimar Germany often shared the view of Glass's doctor that proletarian revolution was a 'metabolic disease', although they disagreed

5 Glass 1919, p. 55. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted. The Spartacus group, which included Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, is the group most often associated with communist revolutionary politics in the period, although, as I will discuss later, this was only partially accurate.

6 Glass 1919, p. 95. Karenow, the revolutionary villain in the novel, was modelled on Karl Radek, one of the more prominent figures in the German communist movement.

7 On the film, see Stiasny 2010. He also stresses the gendered dynamics underlying the depiction of the revolution. 'The film's moral message concerning "humanity unleashed" is clear: the (male) bourgeois, patriarchal order of society is threatened by (feminized) terror and extermination' (p. 57). I will return at length throughout the book to the gendered dimensions of the politics of degeneration.

8 Weindling 1989, pp. 37–39.

over what precisely this meant, as well as over what the proper therapeutic response ought to be. As I will explore in this book, these therapies were most often understood as forms of 'hygiene'. Whether configured as a 'people's hygiene' (*Volkshygiene*), 'social hygiene' (*Sozialhygiene*), or 'racial hygiene' (*Rassenhygiene*), the tendency was to medicalise and biologise social issues. These hygienic concerns informed social welfare policy, labour relations, urban planning, and a host of other practices, with bodies construed as objects of therapeutic intervention or problems to be solved. Therapeutic responses ranged from technocratic means to more violent repressive interventions. The degenerate characteristics catalogued by Nordau were elaborated in conceptions of hygiene, with 'deviant' bodies, often configured along lines of race, gender, sexuality, ability, and class, all appearing as threats to social health.

What united the various approaches to degeneration was a shared sense that individual bodies expressed characteristics of the social body as a whole. Especially on the right, the term that came to be favoured in the first decades of the twentieth century in Germany was the *Volkskörper*. The literal translation of this term is 'people's body', but the German word *Volk* carries with it much stronger primordialist implications of national and racial belonging. As I will show, the idea of the *Volkskörper* incorporated a powerful desire for an integrated and stable social order purged of the destabilising and corrupting degeneracies of modern life. By linking individual bodies with the social body, the idea of the *Volkskörper* enabled social and political conflicts to be read as products of bodily processes, thereby creating the space for hygienic interventions. As I will argue throughout the book, the idea of the *Volkskörper* presented a powerful challenge to the left, first because radical and revolutionary movements were themselves configured as a threat to the health of the social body, and second because left politics often lacked a critical perspective adequate to engage with and challenge theories of degeneration and the hygienic practices to which they gave rise.

The prominence of the novel and film *Humanity Unleashed* within the field of counter-revolutionary politics points to the importance of the cultural sphere in struggles against perceived degeneration. The novel and film themselves were intended as therapeutic interventions in the cultural field, prefiguring many later media interventions designed to promote social hygiene.⁹ While artistic and cultural interventions could potentially be positive, however, the cultural sphere, as Nordau's comments suggest, was more often seen as the source of degenerative threats. Nordau was but one of many who saw

9 I consider these kinds of media interventions throughout the book, but especially in the fifth chapter.

modernist and avant-garde artists as particularly dangerous influences. Together, artistic and political radicalism were thus seen by theorists of degeneration as sources of crisis in the social body and as signs of a disequilibrium that needed to be addressed. Significantly, many within the Communist Party of Germany (*Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands*, or KPD) and on the broader left were also suspicious of artistic radicals, at times using the language of degeneration to decry what they saw as pseudo-radicalism. Thus, while many radical artists joined the revolutionary movements that shook the foundations of the state in 1918–19, their interventions were not always welcome. Indeed, left critics of modernism and the avant-garde often shared with theorists of degeneration a rejection of the tendency of those artistic movements to conceptualise social and political issues in the language of the body. Adding a further layer of complication, the way in which artistic radicals themselves conceptualised these bodies reflected ideas of degeneration. Thus, what we often find are contestations in which all antagonists draw uncritically on conceptions of degeneration. At the same time, though, I will argue throughout this book that it was amongst artistic and cultural radicals that we can find some of the most important critical responses to the politics of degeneration. In some instances, Expressionists, Dadaists, and other prominent modernist and avant-garde artists sought to yoke political radicalism or revolution to emancipatory engagements with the politics of degeneration and embodiment.

Part of the significance of these artistic engagements with degeneration lies in the fact that theories of degeneration themselves drew heavily on aesthetic criteria and cultural traditions in ‘reading’ bodies. Along with Nordau, theorists of degeneration made a habit of citing not only writers, but also literary characters, as evidence of degeneration. Many other works, including medical and other scientific texts, used Greek statuary or other artistic representations to demonstrate bodily ‘health’ or ‘illness’. Aesthetic criteria likewise informed the construction of racial taxonomies, colonial and anthropological ideas of the ‘primitive’, the understanding of (dis)abled bodies, and the shaping of gendered and labouring bodies. We can see these aesthetic debates at work most prominently in depictions of the city, which was the locus of concern for theorists of degeneration. For them, urban life represented a fundamental threat to bodily coherence. Significantly, the fragmenting impact of modern urban life on human perception and subjectivity was also a source of fascination to many modernist and avant-garde artists, these overlapping interests making questions of aesthetics and politics particularly fraught in the period.

While the urban threat was often presented in terms of a generic ‘modernity’ threatening the health of the *Volkskörper*, for conservatives it was the emergence of an industrial proletariat and a working-class movement,

along with the development of a mass consumer society, that was really at the root of their fears. Ideas of degeneration thus need to be understood as emerging not simply out of a generic modernity, but out of *capitalist* modernity. Indeed, for those critics on the left who engaged with the politics of degeneration, it was precisely their focus on the degenerative impacts of capitalism that distinguished their analyses from dominant approaches that tended to read degeneration as biological. Thus, we need to ask the following question: if ideas of degeneration were rooted in the contradictions and conflicts of capitalist modernity, how did anti-capitalist cultural and political movements incorporate this reality into their critical practice? This question frames the discussion in this book.

Ideas of degeneration were by no means unique to the Weimar period in Germany, but in the period from the outbreak of war in 1914 and the Nazi seizure of power in 1933 we find an especially compelling context for studying their development. This period is one of the most studied in German history.¹⁰ Much of this interest is driven by a desire to understand the Nazi catastrophe that followed, a perspective that threatens to limit our understanding of the politics of degeneration by associating it so strongly with its Nazi variants. Beyond the Nazi question, though, the sheer diversity of social, political, and cultural developments has led many to identify Weimar as a (or even *the*) quintessentially modern period. As one particularly breathless account has it, the experience of modernity as fleeting, ungrounded, and contingent 'came to be realized for the first time in the Berlin of the 1920s. Contemporaries experienced it automatically as an absolutely open and thereby highly unstable situation – with all the irritations, acuteness and radicalism that accompany such an experience'.¹¹

This reading of modernity itself owes much to early twentieth-century German theorists like Georg Simmel, who died little more than a month before the Weimar Republic was founded, and whose understanding of urban experience likewise stressed its radical instability.¹² In the juxtaposition of terms like 'irritation' with 'radicalism' in the passage above, we can see (ironically enough) the continued influence of ideas of degeneration in contemporary scholarship, with irritation in particular evoking theories of the over-stimulation of the nervous system that go back to the nineteenth century. This continuity points to the need to think critically about our own analytical approaches.

10 The literature on this period is vast. Some key general histories include: Büttner 2008; Kolb 2005; Mommsen 1996; Peukert 1989; Weitz 2007.

11 Makropoulos 1995, p. 89.

12 See especially Simmel 1990; 'The Metropolis and Mental Life', in Simmel 1971.

As I argue throughout the book, it was in fact during the Weimar period that many critics produced work that can help us do just that. Simmel represents one example, but I focus especially on a number of others, including Walter Benjamin, Siegfried Kracauer, Ernst Bloch, and Georg Lukács.¹³ Several of these writers were associated with the Institute for Social Research (*Institut für Sozialforschung*) in Frankfurt that gave rise to what we now call the Frankfurt School. The work of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, the main figures in the Frankfurt School, likewise play a role in what follows.

What linked these different theorists is that, for all their significant differences, they came out of the Marxist tradition. While this is often acknowledged in contemporary accounts, it is often forgotten that they were writing in a period in which the Communist Party, the KPD, was a major political force. Their Marxist politics was thus rooted in a very real and vital critical engagement with a broad-based working-class movement. Prominent communists like Rosa Luxemburg, Clara Zetkin, and Paul Levi, whose work also plays a significant role in this book, were important interlocutors. The KPD was one of a number of parties, organisations, or movements claiming to speak for and mobilise the working class, although of those many, most notably the German Social Democratic Party (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*, or SPD), eschewed a revolutionary politics. These movements mounted a serious challenge to the power of both older and newer élites. Especially during the events of 1918–19, the sense that a revolutionary transformation had become possible was widespread. It was this sense of possibility that animated the work of many of the Weimar critical theorists. Only by engaging deeply with this revolutionary tradition, I argue, can we come to grips with the social, political, and cultural dynamics of the period.

For all of the possibilities that opened up during the early Weimar period, however, counter-revolutionary forces soon gained the upper hand, leading to the establishment of a liberal democratic Republic that fell short of the demands of many on the left, in particular in the KPD. Deeper social change was blocked in part by the emergence of a radical right who mobilised for a violent struggle against what they considered the ‘Bolshevik’ threat, although they subsequently also attacked the Republic. The radical right built their strength in part on new, virulent conceptions of degeneration that they enacted both in the streets fighting against the left, and in the cultural sphere. Ideas of culture were especially important in this context, forming the basis for broader bourgeois conceptions of German identity and politics. The German term *Kultur* has a broader meaning than the English ‘culture’, though, suggesting rooted

13 See Frisby 1986 for an account of these influences.

and embodied forms of life that were conducive to the kinds of biological thinking characteristic of ideas of degeneration. In this sense, I will argue, the approach of theorists like Benjamin and Kracauer, who argued that an attention to questions of art and culture was crucial to any radical or revolutionary political project, can be read as a broader engagement with the politics of degeneration.

As this brief introduction suggests, this book covers a lot of ground. To reiterate, then, while the arguments developed here are wide-ranging, they are brought together by two primary concerns. First is the notion of degeneration and the question of why so many turned to the idea of the *Volkskörper*, of a unified and 'healthy' individual and social body, as a point of perceived stability in a period of flux and ferment, thereby translating social and political crises into embodied terms.¹⁴ Second, I am interested in exploring the ways in which these dominant social and cultural logics were challenged and reworked, both at the cultural level and in social and political movements. Here I bring modernist and avant-garde artists, new media activists, and cultural theorists together with communists, socialists, anarchists, feminists, and activists for homosexual rights, disability politics, and anti-racist and anti-imperialist struggles. Not all of these consistently challenged the repressive politics of social hygiene and even more virulent forms of eugenics but, I argue, in sifting through their work we can find emancipatory responses. Notably, it was often on the margins and in the cracks of more institutionalised forms of politics that we can find the most interesting responses to the culture and politics of degeneration.

The book itself follows a roughly chronological sequence, moving from the experience of the First World War in the second chapter, to the final years of the Weimar period in the last. However, because the issues treated here overlap and change throughout the period, and tie into longer histories that begin before 1918 and continue beyond 1933, the discussion often diverges from a strictly chronological path. In this introduction I will lay out the broader frameworks within which my discussions in later chapters take place. I begin in the next section with an overview of the history of the Weimar period and a discussion of some key historiographical debates that have shaped our understanding of the period. Central to this section is the idea of 'crisis', which often appears as the framework for understanding Weimar culture and society. This historical overview provides the basis for a conceptualisation of the political dynamics of the period. Then, I turn to a detailed analysis of conceptions of degeneration and embodiment that run through the book. As part of that discussion I draw on Marx and a range of other theorists both within and outside

14 See Föllmer 2001 for a discussion of this tendency.

the Marxist tradition to argue that the logic of degeneration is fundamentally bound up with the logic of capitalism. Only from this perspective, I contend, can we understand the cultural and social dynamics that gave rise to ideas of degeneration, and develop a critical theory adequate to the challenges that these dynamics pose. The introduction concludes with an overview of the structure of the book.

1.2 Weimar Germany: The Crises of Capitalist Modernity

In 1933, just after the Nazi seizure of power, Walter Benjamin published 'Experience and Poverty', an essay in which he looked back on the ways in which the First World War and its aftermath had transformed the very nature of experience itself. 'For never has experience been contradicted more thoroughly: strategic experience has been contravened by positional warfare; economic experience, by the inflation; physical experience, by hunger; moral experiences, by the ruling powers'.¹⁵ Benjamin here captures a powerful sense of crisis that was widely shared by his contemporaries, with one study counting over 370 Weimar-era texts on politics, society, and economics that had 'crisis' or 'crises' in the title.¹⁶ The idea of 'crisis' has been taken up in many subsequent works as well, leaving us with a powerful sense that the period was somehow unique in this respect. Indeed, it is difficult to disagree with these assessments, with Benjamin indicating several of the reasons why: the War itself, economic crisis and unimaginable inflation, destitution, and political repression. What distinguishes Benjamin's account, however, is his dialectical reading of this history. Crisis, he suggests, is a product of social contradictions through which experience is at once negated and transformed. The experience of crisis of which he writes is both concrete and universal, simultaneously the product of specific histories of war and economic upheaval in Germany on the one hand, and of the systemic contradictions of capitalism on the other; only by attending to both of these dimensions can Weimar history be adequately grasped. Benjamin's is a perspective that informs this book. In this section, I will look more closely at the concrete histories of the Weimar period, in the next reading these histories through a broader theorisation of capitalist modernity.

An overview of the broad sweep of Weimar history, with particular attention to the left, will be useful to begin. The establishment of the Weimar Republic

15 'Experience and Poverty', in Benjamin 1999b, p. 732.

16 Föllmer, Graf, and Leo 2005, p. 10.

came in the aftermath of the shattering impact of the First World War. If we look for crisis, it is difficult to find any greater than this violent upheaval. The War not only involved unprecedented levels of violence and death, but German defeat also provoked a crisis of legitimacy for the old governing structures of the German Reich, leading to the abdication of the Kaiser and the establishment of a parliamentary system of government. The SPD had long been the single largest party in the country but up until 1918 had been excluded from meaningful participation in government. The rapidly changing political situation during and after the War transformed both the Party and its place in the political landscape. During the War the Party split over whether or not to support the war effort, with those opposed eventually leaving to form the Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany (*Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*, or USPD). The USPD provided an important opposition to the militarist state, but what truly drove the delegitimisation of the old order over the course of the War was the experience of growing hardship and the spontaneous mobilisation of ordinary people, predominantly women. I trace this history in the second chapter.

The establishment of a republic in the aftermath of the War was the result of a rather strange process, with the old imperial centres of power in some respects simply melting away. The Kaiser abdicated and a parliamentary system was accepted as inevitable by the older ruling élites. Elements of this older élite recognised the profound delegitimisation of imperial social structures and the need to temporarily or provisionally relinquish some power, in order, it was hoped, to regroup and prevent more profound changes. By allowing the SPD into power some even hoped that the Party would bear the blame for the armistice, a ploy that, as we shall see, met with a significant degree of success.¹⁷ While aspects of the old social order may have melted away, the violent struggles that marked the founding of the Republic demonstrated that the influence of the old order in fact remained strong. The post-War struggles were thus about the extent to which those older influences would remain and the nature of the republican state that would emerge.

The 'German Revolution', as it is often called, began with the Kiel mutiny of 31 November 1918, a refusal of sailors to engage in a futile last-ditch action against the English fleet; this rebellion inaugurated a series of uprisings throughout the country.¹⁸ The SPD, no longer the sole party of the working class, took up an often contradictory position within these revolutionary events. With the abdication of the Kaiser, they found themselves the leading party in government. From this position they sought to push for the establishment of

17 For a good overview of the establishment of the Republic, see Mommsen 1996, pp. 1–19.

18 Broué 2005, pp. 129–55; Friedlander 1992.

a parliamentary system, greater rights for workers, universal suffrage, and a range of other reforms. But they also worked hard to contain the spread of revolutionary sentiment, refusing to countenance the possibility that the post-War upheavals could go beyond limited reforms and threaten the basis of capitalist order. Thus, while facing resistance to economic and political reforms from parties to the right, they also had to contend with the USPD and other more revolutionary factions to the left – such as the Spartacus movement and the Revolutionary Shop Stewards – some of which combined to form the KPD at the very end of 1918. The pre-war SPD had already been dominated by a reformist orientation, and the splits during the War left the Party with at most a purely rhetorical commitment to a revolutionary project.

Whether or not the post-War events *were* a revolution is a matter of some debate. As the satirist Kurt Tucholsky wryly proclaimed in 1919, '[w]e have not had a revolution in Germany, but we have had a counter-revolution'.¹⁹ Sebastian Haffner's influential history calls it a 'revolution betrayed'.²⁰ Certainly revolutionary organisations in late 1918 were weak and fragmented. The USPD of 1918 included a wide range of political currents, from reformist pacifists to Rosa Luxemburg and the revolutionary Spartacus group.²¹ The latter left the USPD with the formation of the KPD, which itself was riven from the start by fights between Luxemburg and the Spartacists on the one hand, and the more ultra-left and putschist elements who ultimately gained the upper hand at the founding congress on the other. Foreshadowing debates that would continue over the next fifteen years, these radicals pushed for an immediate attempt to overthrow the bourgeois state, rejecting Luxemburg's argument that '[w]hat I see up until now is the unripeness of the masses' for revolution.²² Even after the formation of the KPD, the USPD retained a broad base in the working class, meaning that three parties staked claims to proletarian leadership. Beyond the parties, the Revolutionary Shop Stewards within the labour movement also had a significant level of support and organisation that made them one of the most significant actors in the revolutionary events, although this influence was relatively short lived.²³

19 Quoted in Barth 2003, p. 198.

20 Haffner 1969. The English translation of the book's title is 'Failure of a Revolution', while the German original is 'The Revolution Betrayed [*Die verratene Revolution*]'.

21 McKibben 1992.

22 Quoted in Bock 1969, p. 102. On the founding congress, see pp. 87–102.

23 There is relatively little research on this group, with Ralf Hoffrogge's biography of one of the main figures in the movement, Richard Müller, the most useful source (2008). See also Müller's own very important histories of the German Revolution (1924; 1925a; 1925b).

These competing groups struggled to shape the most significant political development that emerged in this period, the council movement. Beginning with the initial uprisings amongst the sailors and spreading through both the military and workplaces, workers' and soldiers' councils were set up that took effective control over many aspects of military, economic, and social life. Peasants' councils also appeared in some areas. The councils reflected the complex political landscape on the left, with many dominated by SPD currents, and others seeking to enact a more thoroughgoing transformation of the state and, in some cases, capitalist workplace structures and broader economic practices. As I will argue in later chapters, these councils promised an alternative form of political organisation that offered a potent challenge to the parliamentary model.

Even though many councils were oriented to the SPD, Party leaders, including the new head of the transitional government Friedrich Ebert, rejected them as a basis of political legitimacy. Older élites saw in them a threat of 'Bolshevism', a position with which Ebert concurred, and while the SPD depended on the councils for their authority in many respects, they also simultaneously worked vigorously to undermine them. The SPD collaborated with existing state structures in this respect, including the military. This cooperation deepened with the uprisings of early January 1919, subsequently known as the 'Spartacist uprising' despite the fact that the group did not instigate the revolts. The SPD responded by facilitating the action of radical right-wing paramilitaries, or *Freikorps* (Free Corps), in crushing the insurrection and restoring 'order' throughout the country. These *Freikorps* saw action in a number of struggles, militarising the fight against the revolutionary left and violently repressing attempts to go beyond limited reforms of the German state. These reforms included universal suffrage, the eight-hour workday, more comprehensive unemployment and social welfare benefits, greater control over workplaces, and other advances, but they fell far short of the worker self-determination that many had fought for, let alone the broader regrounding of the national economy on socialist lines. The SPD's collaboration also meant that state structures and existing bureaucrats were left largely in place, a fateful lack of change that provided reactionary forces with a strong platform and left the Weimar Republic on an unstable foundation.

The crushing of the initial revolutionary upsurge did not mean an end to agitation. Within the KPD an initial purge of ultra-left currents in 1919 – which led to the formation of the Communist Workers' Party of Germany (*Kommunistische Arbeiter-Partei Deutschlands*, or KAPD)²⁴ – was the first of many instances of

24 Bock 1969, pp. 225–62.

conflict over the direction of the Party. Tensions broke into the open repeatedly as the Party faced the difficulties of mobilisation and action in increasingly unfavourable circumstances. The radical right-wing Kapp-Lüttwitz putsch in 1920 again exposed the tensions within the Party. With the leader Paul Levi, a follower of Luxemburg, in prison, the KPD again took a more ultra-left line, refusing to support the general strike action taken by workers in response to the putsch because its goal was the defence of the republican state. The strike was successful in blocking the coup attempt, but, as in 1918–19, once the worker mobilisation turned in a more radical direction it was met with SPD-sanctioned repression. Levi was among those who condemned the KPD leadership for mistakenly refusing to support the broader movement. The tendency to ultra-leftism, however, reflected changes in the Party as younger male activists, radicalised by war and revolution, promoted a maximalist position against Party activists with a longer history, who tended to recognise the extent to which revolutionary action depended upon a strong base in the working class. The older activists argued that such a base could not magically be called into being.²⁵ The ultra-left tendency thus dovetailed with a masculinisation of Party culture that, as we shall see especially in the third and sixth chapters, proved to be a major factor in shaping and in many respects holding back mobilisation throughout the Weimar period.

In the aftermath of the putsch, in late 1920, the USPD dissolved itself, with the majority left wing of the membership uniting with the KPD and the remainder returning to the SPD. The KPD was now truly a mass party, with over 300,000 members, but the old debates continued to resurface. At issue was the conflict between the Luxemburgist position that, in Germany at least, revolutionary action required mass working-class participation, and those who argued that power could be seized by a disciplined revolutionary minority, as with the Bolsheviks in Russia. With Levi no longer the Party chair, having been replaced by Heinrich Brandler, it was the latter group who decided to commit the Party to a confrontation in 1921 that, they believed, would spark a wider revolutionary surge. The failed ‘March Action’ of that year thus sought to reclaim

25 Pierre Broué's *The German Revolution* offers the strongest defence of Levi's approach, arguing that '[h]e was the only person who posed in political terms the problem of Communism immediately after the victory of the revolution in Russia, how to graft onto the old solidly and deeply rooted tree of the Western workers' movement the living graft of the revolutionary advance of 1917 and of conciliar power. There was to be no one after him to face the Russians but plagiarists and parrots, as he put it, apart from those who hesitated and remained silent, resigned in advance to being condemned as wrong' (2005, p. 887).

momentum through a putschist radical action.²⁶ The strategy was deeply flawed, and the Party was left weakened and fragmented, with Levi pushed out of the Party for criticising its conduct in his pamphlet 'Our Path'.²⁷ Despite arguments from Levi and others, the Party's course continued to be shaped by the younger male radicals whose demands for immediate militant action undercut the development of a mass base for the Party.²⁸

These struggles on the left took place in the context of a broader social instability. The immediate post-War years had seen the return to a peacetime economy, but hardship and dislocation produced by the demands of demobilisation continued. The signing of the Treaty of Versailles on 28 June 1919 left Germany with significant reparations payments and imposed a number of other conditions on the country. As we shall see, these provisions were to have a huge impact, symbolic as much as real, throughout the Weimar years. While many, especially but not only on the right, blamed the treaty for Germany's woes, the economy was plagued by deeper structural instabilities and state policies that led to a dramatic rise in inflation in 1921, turning by 1923 into an almost unimaginable hyperinflation in which, in December, the dollar exchange rate of the paper Mark reached a peak of 4.2 trillion.²⁹ As Gustav Stresemann, then Foreign Minister, noted in 1927: 'the intellectual and commercial middle class, which was traditionally the pillar of loyalty to the state', was proletarianised by the inflation,³⁰ a sharpening of a structural shift in the economy that had a significant impact on the class politics of the period, a development that, as we shall see in later chapters, was theorised with particular acuity by Siegfried Kracauer. The French and Belgians saw the inflation as a deliberate attempt to get out from under the reparations burden, and occupied the key industrial Ruhr region in early 1923, adding another indignity to what many Germans saw as unjustly punitive Allied peace terms. The occupation sparked a campaign of passive resistance to which the right laid claim, but that was in fact driven to

26 On the March Action, see Schumann 2009, pp. 54–85; Koch-Baumgarten 1986. Koch-Baumgarten argues that it was in the events of 1921 rather than after 1923 that the KPD began to take on a more authoritarian internal structure.

27 Levi 2009.

28 David Fernbach argues that part of the antipathy to Levi was due not only to his bourgeois roots (something that applied to many leaders), but also to his divergence from an idealised proletarian masculinity, even speculating that Levi may have been gay and the response due to homophobia (2009, pp. 108–10).

29 Feldman 1993, p. 5. In addition to Feldman's massive study, on the inflation see also Geyer 1998; Widdig 2001.

30 Quoted in Weitz 2007, p. 138.

a significant degree by the left.³¹ The crisis in the Ruhr led to yet another set of debates within the KPD over its position in relation to the working class and to the SPD, with the policy of a united front with social-democratic workers that the Party had adopted after the March Action coming under severe pressure once again from those who advocated immediate revolutionary action.³² By this point as well Moscow and the Comintern had begun to take on a much more important role in directing events in Germany. Plans for an insurrection were formulated, but, with the exception of a failed action in Hamburg, never came to fruition. By the end of the crisis the left had again been contained, with the events bringing to a final end the revolutionary wave that had begun in 1917, with the KPD turning increasingly towards parliamentary activism.

Debates over the role of the KPD and its internal dynamics in this period have been fierce. The Party shifted to a more parliamentary orientation after 1923, but historians have debated the extent to which this may or may not have reflected more fundamental shifts in Party culture. In the 1960s Hermann Weber developed the argument that, after 1923, the Party underwent a 'Stalinisation' whereby, '[i]nstead of the self-liberation of the working class, it henceforth worked for the stalinised Party apparatus'.³³ As he put it in a later defence of his position, the transformation of German communism meant that '[i]t developed from a Party with internal democracy to a tightly disciplined organisation with strictly centralised authority'.³⁴ His argument, however, came under sustained attack from Klaus-Michael Mallmann in 1996. Mallmann offered a profoundly different vision of Party culture, arguing that its authoritarian character was evident long before 1924, and was in fact a result of domestic developments rather than Soviet influence.³⁵ Thus, in his reading German communism offered meagre resources for an emancipatory politics.

The debate that ensued has been especially important for clarifying the nature of the development of the Party over the course of the Weimar period. Certainly Mallmann's intervention has been useful in drawing attention to the everyday Party practices that are lost in accounts focusing on debates that went on amongst the leadership. Thus, while he does not endorse Mallmann's conclusions about Stalinisation, Eric Weitz's important work has used such social historical approaches to engage with Party culture and show how its internal

31 Wenzel 2003; Fischer 2007.

32 See Bayerlein and Babichenko 2003 for a collection of documents detailing the debates within the left. On the events of 1923, see Jentsch 2005; Wenzel 2003.

33 Weber 1969, 1, p. 13.

34 Weber 2007, p. 222.

35 Mallmann 1996.

dynamics as well as the contexts in which it was struggling helped to promote the growth of authoritarian practices. Notably, he is one of the few to take up the question of gender in a significant way.³⁶

Despite Mallmann's challenge, however, the broad strokes of Weber's argument have largely stood up to re-examination, defended by a number of historians who confirm the fundamental shift in Party culture as one in which '[p]olitical conflicts were no longer "solved" politically, but rather organisationally', that is, through a demand for conformity enforced by suppression and expulsion.³⁷ The Luxemburgist heritage of Party democracy remained a significant force within the KPD at least until 1923, with key Party activists like Paul Levi and Ernst Meyer defending this pluralistic culture. The latter, who was briefly installed as Party leader while Brandler was imprisoned, thus challenged the expulsion of various members in the aftermath of the 'March Action', and argued in 1921 that 'it is absolutely necessary to intervene with a stronger hand in the political life of the Party, but not through organisational measures, rather through a political consideration of the issues'.³⁸

These historiographical debates show that we need to be attentive to both leadership debates and the culture of the Party when trying to understand the development of the KPD. What is clear, though, is that while contestations over the Party's direction were extensive, it also underwent a significant change around 1923 in terms of its internal culture and its understanding of the Party's role in relation to proletarian politics. This argument is crucial to understanding the political developments of the revolutions of the early Weimar period, and to the period as a whole. Weber's argument implies that the field of possibilities in the early Weimar years was not limited simply to republican democracy or a choice of authoritarianisms on the right and left, a perspective developed by theorists of totalitarianism. As I will discuss below, these reductive approaches miss the emancipatory possibilities that existed in more organised form in the early Weimar years, but that continued to resonate later as well. Tracing these emancipatory currents is a major focus of this book.

In tracing these political developments I make two central arguments not captured in most of the literature on the history of the KPD. First, as the Party's democratic culture was eroded, it was in the cultural realm that many of these emancipatory perspectives resurfaced. In part because of the Party's relative lack of interest in cultural matters, there was somewhat greater scope for the voicing of oppositional perspectives in ways that did not appear to represent

36 Weitz 1997.

37 Bois 2008, p. 58.

38 Quoted in Wilde 2006, p. 174.

a direct political challenge. This cultural turn was ambivalent in its implications, however, as not only was it a product of the Party's increasingly repressive internal practices, I will argue in the final chapter that it also reflected the Party's own precarious position in the political landscape of the later Weimar years. Second, I argue that while the question of internal Party democracy is of major significance, both sides in the debate tend to miss the extent to which the gendered dynamics of the Party limited its internal democracy both prior to and after 1923. The masculinist basis of Party culture changed in nature over the course of the Weimar period, but at all points imposed serious limitations on its ability to broaden its revolutionary base and expand its conception of 'the political' beyond a narrow range of possibilities.³⁹ It is here too that we can see the extent to which the lack of a critical analysis of the politics of degeneration and the *Volkskörper*, which was fundamentally gendered, constrained left politics.

The year 1923 was significant not only for the shifts within the KPD, but also for the broader social changes that formed the context for the Party's development. As noted earlier, 1923 saw inflation brought under control and the economy stabilise. The effects of the inflation were significant, producing a major transfer of wealth from the working and middle classes to financial and industrial élites, the reduction of wages, and, perhaps most significantly, the erosion of some of the improvements in working conditions that had been won with the establishment of the Republic. The most notable of these was the effective loss of the eight-hour workday. The relative stabilisation weakened the left, including in some respects the SPD, with political mobilisation shifting from the streets to the parliamentary sphere. By the same token, the influence of the radical right that had been mobilised by the counter-revolution temporarily faded.

As David Abraham argues, stabilisation inaugurated a period of economic growth in which political stability was sustained by the export-driven sectors of the economy in conjunction with heavy industry, with those sectors of the capitalist class relying on the reformist proletariat for a mass base of support. This support, Abraham contends, was sustained by increasing standards of living and the entrenchment of a welfare system that became the bedrock on which the SPD staked its political legitimacy.⁴⁰ The welfare system enabled the SPD to maintain its dominant position as the party of choice for working-class

39 Eric Weitz's study of the history of German communism, which is carefully attuned to the gendered dynamics of the Party's development, is exceptional in this regard. See Weitz 1997.

40 Abraham 1989, pp. 46–52.

voters, but, as we shall see, it was also a primary vehicle for the extension of technocratic forms of social management, including the enactment of social hygienic and eugenic measures. Social welfare thus needs to be understood not simply as Abraham understands it, as a way of supporting reformist and collaborationist tendencies in the working class, but also as a project that built on the idea of a healthy *Volkskörper* in seeking to stabilise both capitalism and the republican order.

By 1924 a new configuration of power had thus emerged out of the upheavals of the previous five years. The currency stabilised after the introduction of a new Mark, hyperinflation ended, and, with the introduction of the Dawes Plan, reparations payments were regularised and Germany gained greater access to international capital markets. While the economy grew and standards of living rose, it took until 1927 for levels of industrial output to reach 1913 levels.⁴¹ The middle Weimar years also marked a shift in the political landscape. Until 1923, the SPD had been the party of government, although always in coalition with a range of other centrist and even centre-right parties. For much of the period of stabilisation, however, the SPD was out of government nationally (although they maintained their crucial dominant position in the state of Prussia), with bourgeois coalitions including variously the Catholic Centre Party (*Zentrumspartei*), the German People's Party (*Deutsche Volkspartei*, or DVP), the German National People's Party (*Deutschnationale Volkspartei*, or DNVP), and the German Democratic Party (*Deutsche Demokratische Partei*, or DDP) taking control. The year 1925 saw the election of the conservative General Paul von Hindenburg to the presidency. He had been the supreme commander of the German military during the War, and would ultimately sanction Hitler's accession to power. The political character of this phase of the Weimar period was profoundly contradictory, with economic improvement giving a basis for stability even while the Republic retained many of the structural weaknesses that stemmed from its foundation.⁴²

The period of relative stability lasted until the onset of the Depression in 1929, and its impact was felt in many areas. In the cultural realm the shift was notable especially for the turn to what was called a 'new sobriety' or 'new objectivity' (*neue Sachlichkeit*) that replaced the more dramatic cultural

⁴¹ Weitz 2007, p. 146.

⁴² Achilles 2005 argues that the more common view of the Republic as fragile and unpopular, supported only by what were derisively called 'rational republicans' (*Vernunftsrepublikaner*), is overstated, and that the republican ideal had put down roots. While true, it was also the case that the lack of a significant reformation of older state structures and bureaucracies left the Republic without an adequate institutional base.

experimentation of Expressionism and Dada, the two most famous forms of modernist and avant-garde art that dominated the early Weimar years.⁴³ Those artists, as we shall see, had played important roles in the revolutionary movements of the early Weimar years, but the failure of those political movements led to a retrenchment in the cultural sphere as well. At the same time, the ebbing of the revolutionary wave led the KPD to look to other means of working-class mobilisation, which included a growing focus on the cultural sphere. The search for a 'proletarian culture', which at times drew on avant-garde approaches, led to the emergence of worker-driven movements in photography, film, newspapers, theatre, and literature that gathered steam over the course of the period and flowered in the later Weimar years. These developments, I will argue, were important for a number of reasons. First, they offered an important response to the growing influence of mass commercial culture on working-class audiences. Second, it was in the cultural realm that we find some of the most sustained engagements with the politics of degeneration and embodiment on the left, critical perspectives that tended to be ignored in political debates. Finally, it was in the cultural sphere that many of the emancipatory impulses associated with the radical council movement were sustained as Weimar society and the KPD itself took on increasingly repressive characteristics. As I will argue in the final chapter, the erosion of the social bases of the radical left elevated the prominence of the cultural sphere, leaving it as one of the few areas within which left mobilisations could claim successes in the final years of the Republic.

The global economic crisis of the late 1920s brought the period of relative stability to an end. Industrial production plummeted, dropping 43 percent by 1932–33 from its high five years earlier, and official unemployment hit 6.1 million in February 1932, with the real rate significantly higher.⁴⁴ This economic upheaval undermined the social bases of stability. Political violence increased once again, most often involving attacks by radical right thugs and paramilitaries, not to mention the police, against the left.⁴⁵ The electoral fortunes of many of the parties fluctuated dramatically, but, while the KPD's vote trended upwards, it was the Nazi Party that gained the most. The crisis shifted the political terrain dramatically in favour of the right. The early 1930s thus saw a

43 Overviews of artistic developments in the period include Willett 1978, West 2001.

44 Mommsen 1996, pp. 365–67.

45 Rosenhaft 1983; Schumann 2009. This has led to debates among historians as to whether or not the period could be characterised as one of civil war (see Blasius 2005; Winkler 1992).

succession of increasingly conservative governments led in turn by Heinrich Brüning, Franz von Papen, and Kurt von Schleicher.

Spaces for political organising on the left were gradually closed off, with employers using the economic crisis as a pretext not only for severely eroding working conditions, but also for purging communists and other radicals from workplaces. The dynamics of left organising thus shifted dramatically, with the KPD forced increasingly into the streets. Spurred on by Moscow, but also by their own experience of SPD complicity in repression, the KPD developed the disastrous notion of 'social fascism', which characterised the SPD as being just as dangerous as the Nazis.⁴⁶ It was also in this period, however, that we see the more emancipatory perspectives developed in the cultural sphere come to the fore, and new coalitions forged that, in particular in relation to the politics of the body, offered powerful challenges to the rising power of the radical right. As I will discuss in the last chapter, this was especially evident in the struggle for the decriminalisation of abortion, a movement that took up the question of reproductive politics so central to conceptions of degeneration.

The last years of the Weimar period were thus again marked by profound crisis, with the Nazis proclaiming their seizure of power in 1933 as a moment of national regeneration, overcoming the degeneracy of the preceding period. In that sense, the Nazis were but one of many movements that claimed to resolve the contradictions thrown up by capitalist modernity through the restitution of a healthy *Volkskörper*. It is this final crisis that, for obvious reasons, has animated historiographical debates over the nature of Weimar crises, but, as I have noted, the idea of crisis pervades readings of Weimar culture and politics more broadly. A number of important recent works have analysed and historicised the notion of crisis itself as a central facet of Weimar culture and politics, opening up rich readings of crisis as both danger and opportunity for transformation, and stressing the extent to which a sense of crisis was culturally produced.⁴⁷ Where interpretations differ, however, is on the status of 'crisis': was Weimar uniquely prone to crisis, or were Weimar crises specific instances of broader crises in capitalist modernity? Was the sense of crisis reflective of reality, or produced through a culture that, as Todd Herzog puts it, involved a 'criminalistic fantasy'? Weimar, Herzog suggests, was 'a *culture of crisis*, a society that did not just suffer from crises but continually defined itself through

46 Weber 2007 stresses the role played by the Comintern and the Stalinisation of the Party in the emergence of the social fascist perspective, as well as in perpetuating a logic of violence (pp. 240–41).

47 Canning, Barndt and McGuire 2010; Föllmer and Graf 2005; Hardtwig 2007.

its perceived crises'.⁴⁸ 'Crisis' here appears as a kind of Weimar pathology, a cultural malaise that produced the catastrophe of fascism.

This question of crisis was evident already in one of the more significant German historiographical conflicts of the last few decades, namely the *Sonderweg* debates. Advocates of the idea of a *Sonderweg*, or 'special path', argued that, by virtue of its lack of a proper bourgeois revolution, the continuing influence of landed aristocratic élites, and various other structural factors, Germany's modernisation was incomplete, producing systemic weaknesses that ultimately led to the Nazi catastrophe.⁴⁹ Weimar's crises in this reading were specific to Germany. Critics argued, however, that this narrative was based on a number of false assumptions. Most notably, Geoff Eley and David Blackbourn contended that Germany did in fact experience a 'silent bourgeois revolution', and that in any event the *Sonderweg* thesis relied on a normative model of modernisation and capitalist development that wrongly took other models, especially the English one, as a template against which to measure a German 'failure'.⁵⁰ Weimar crises, they argued, were thus historically specific, but remained within the larger logic of capitalist modernisation, an argument that echoes that of Benjamin with which I began this section.

Perhaps the most influential book in this latter vein has been Detlev Peukert's *The Weimar Republic*. For Peukert the period marked – as the subtitle of his book puts it – a 'crisis of classical modernity'.⁵¹ Because it expressed this broader crisis, Peukert argues, Weimar also needs to be read on its own terms – not just as a precursor to the Nazi seizure of power. What makes Peukert's work especially interesting for my argument is that he also argued that demographic questions were of crucial importance in the unfolding of Weimar crises.⁵² What in German is called *Bevölkerungspolitik* ('population politics') stands at the heart of his account, with the politics of social hygiene and welfare especially prominent. This perspective has been further developed by a number of other authors.⁵³ Peukert's reading of Weimar history suggests

48 See Herzog 2009, p. 6. As he notes, though, this sense of the world as a dangerous place was not unique to the culture of the Weimar period.

49 Notable early examples include Dahrendorf 1967; Wehler 1985.

50 Eley and Blackbourn 1984 (see especially pp. 51–61 and 176–205).

51 Peukert 1989. This is the subtitle of the English translation, although the German original was 'Krisenjahre der klassischen Moderne', more literally the 'crisis years of classical modernity'.

52 Peukert 1989, especially pp. 86–106.

53 For overviews, see Weipert 2006; Krassnitzer and Overath 2007. Some of the most important work in this area has come from feminist scholars. See especially Grossmann 1995; Kundrus 1995; Manz 2007; Planert 2000; Rouette 1993; Usborne 1992, 2007.

that the concerns over degeneration and the health of the *Volkskörper* with which I am concerned are crucial to coming to grips with the history of the period; more than Peukert, however, I will stress the ways in which these histories need to be read specifically in terms of gender, race, sexuality, and ability.

Central to any adequate understanding of crisis, as I have indicated, is the question of capitalism. The tendency in Weimar historiography is to elide the systemic nature of the crisis, reading it more specifically in terms of the contingent crises faced by the republican order or, with the *Sonderweg* approach, as a product of German specificity. Peter Fritzsche's oft-cited article asking 'Did Weimar Fail?' thus tends to be answered by referring to the failures of the Republic. For Fritzsche, Weimar modernity was a 'workshop' in which visions of the future were contested, but he reads its success and failure in terms of a generic modernity whose implicit ideal state is a liberal-democratic order; capitalism drops out of the account.⁵⁴ Even for Peukert the horizon in which he writes is that of *classical* modernity, arguing that 'although we may no longer be convinced that there is such a thing as a royal road to modernization, the Weimar Republic's attempts to deal with the conflicts caused by modernization are of special interest precisely, though not only, because the Republic ultimately fell victim to these conflicts.'⁵⁵ For Peukert, then, Weimar did fail, a failure ultimately related to the collapse of a parliamentary or liberal democratic politics. If we look at modernity as capitalist, however, we might answer this question differently. What, we might ask, does this 'falling victim to' the contradictions of modernity mean? Or, to turn the question around, what would it mean *not* to fail?

My argument in this book is that the liberal democratic answer is not adequate, both in political and historiographical terms. To put it rather bluntly, the 'failure' of the parliamentary Republic can in fact be read as a 'success' from the perspective of the stabilisation of capitalism. Indeed, the mobilisation of the anti-parliamentary right, including the Nazis, was facilitated by both older and newer élites precisely as a way of furthering the project of stabilisation. In this sense, the rise of Nazism needs to be read as a historically specific response to the crises of *capitalist* modernity, not simply *classical* modernity. It was not a phenomenon external to that social formation any more than was the KPD, leaving us still with the challenge posed by Geoff Eley a number of years ago, to begin 'theorizing fascism in terms of the crisis that produced it'.⁵⁶

54 Fritzsche 1996.

55 Peukert 1989, p. 83.

56 Eley 1989, p. 92.

The tendency to treat liberal democracy as the dehistoricised horizon in accounts of the Weimar period leads us to another related historiographical issue. The notion of Weimar 'failure' often relies on an implicit or explicit understanding of ideas of 'totalitarianism' (although some, like Peukert, resist this tendency).⁵⁷ This approach holds that, in opposing the republican order, the parties of the radical right and left together bore the responsibility for the failure of the Weimar experiment, and hence were fundamentally similar in their authoritarian character despite the implacable enmity with which they faced each other in the period itself. In this reading, then, the very different historical roles played by the radical left and right are elided, and through this historiographical sleight of hand the idea of 'crisis' is shifted from capitalism to the liberal democratic public sphere, with the latter now presented as under attack from forces 'outside' that order.

Theories of totalitarianism owe much to the conception of the public sphere theorised most explicitly in Jürgen Habermas's *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*.⁵⁸ Drawing on an idealised conception of debates in coffee houses and newspapers in early modern Britain that was marked by 'people's public use of their own reason',⁵⁹ Habermas contends that the public sphere was characterised by a rationality whose autonomy was guaranteed in a sphere in which market laws 'were suspended as were laws of the state'.⁶⁰ While Habermas himself argued that the classical public sphere was no longer operative in the conditions of a welfare state like Weimar Germany, the idea of rationality outlined in his account is precisely the one which, in theories of

57 Eley was thus far too confident in claiming in 1989 that 'certain old certainties (like totalitarianism or the Orthodox Marxist approaches) have been abandoned' (Eley 1989, p. 70). It is true that totalitarianism as a framework is perhaps less prevalent, but it has not been abandoned, and its influence continues to be felt even when not invoked directly. Orthodox Marxist approaches have faded to a much greater extent, but that loss has arguably had a deleterious effect, since the liberal democratic assumptions of much of the historiography are now even less likely to be challenged than they were in the 1970s and 80s.

58 Habermas 1989. Habermas's work comes out of the Frankfurt School tradition, and his conception of the public sphere is thus rooted in part in the historiographical debates outlined here.

59 Habermas 1989, p. 27.

60 Habermas 1989, p. 36. It should be noted that in Habermas's view the ideal public sphere was only fleetingly actualised in eighteenth-century Britain, and was undermined thereafter by the shift from a 'public critically reflecting on its culture to one that merely consumes it' (p. 175). Applying his approach to Weimar is in this sense somewhat inaccurate – a problem not noted by those putting forward the 'totalitarian' view.

totalitarianism, is said to be challenged by the 'irrational' and violent politics of both radical right and left. Habermas too stressed that '[l]aws passed under the "pressure of the street" [*dem Druck der Strasse*] could hardly be understood any longer as embodying the reasonable consensus of publicly debating private persons'.⁶¹ As Warren Montag argues, this powerful fear of the contaminating influence of 'the street' runs deep in Habermas's work, limiting what can be considered 'political' in a way that excludes most forms of popular mobilisation.⁶² It is this fear that likewise runs through theories of totalitarianism.

In its most egregious instances, the totalitarian approach tends to downplay the impact of the radical right and to repeat the fears of 'Bolshevisation' that were so often heard coming not only from the right, but also from bourgeois politicians and the SPD throughout the Weimar years. Crucially, the fear of 'the street' accords with ideas of degeneration that saw the 'mob' and other degenerate bodies as threats to the health of the social body. As Nancy Fraser argues in her critique of Habermas, the exclusion of those designated 'irrational', including especially women, but also racialised people, those labeled insane, and others, in fact served to constitute the boundaries of the public sphere and exclude those who fell 'outside'.⁶³

There are many examples of the pernicious influence of the idea of totalitarianism on historical literature, but looking at one recent instance can help to illustrate the problem. Riccardo Bavaj's book *From the Left against Weimar* is especially pertinent as he looks at many of the same radical artists and intellectuals that I will take up in this book, claiming them as bearers of totalitarian impulses. Bavaj argues that while much attention has been paid to right-wing attacks on parliamentary democracy, we also need to be attentive to what he calls the 'anti-parliamentarism' of the radical left. His book, he says, explores the 'common figures of thought and paradigms, similar topoi and explanatory schema, and structural or methodological-argumentative similarities between both totalitarian ideologies'.⁶⁴ He acknowledges that the right was more responsible for the overthrow of Weimar parliamentarism, but he 'advocates more strongly for the view that these extremes be set in relation to one another and their fatal dialectic be made visible'.⁶⁵ Quoting Andreas Wirsching, he thus contends that '[t]he totalitarian movements of both extremes held up the

61 Habermas 1989, p. 132.

62 Montag 2000. See also Polan 1993; Roberts 2004. Eley 1992 stresses that Habermas thereby excluded forms of working-class mobilisation from his conception of the public sphere.

63 Fraser 1992.

64 Bavaj 2005, p. 29.

65 Bavaj 2005, p. 490.

constitutional state [*Rechtsstaat*] and pluralistic democracy as their “primary ideological enemy”. Weimar communism in this way made “no substantial differentiation between the democratic constitutional state and fascism”.⁶⁶ Certainly this last point is true in the sense that the late Weimar notion of ‘social fascism’ promoted by the KPD did collapse these crucial differences, thus vitiating resistance to the rise of the Nazis. But, Bavaj is going beyond a critique of a specific policy decision to an indictment of the revolutionary left as a whole, as a result ending by absolving the centre of most responsibility.

For all the joint responsibility of the liberal and social-democratic forces for the fragility of the first German democracy, the primary responsibility for its collapse lay in the fatal grip with which the movements of the political extremes and their radical anti-systemic goals held the Weimar Republic. Already in the first days of the revolution Weimar left extremism played unknowingly into the hands of its right-wing equivalent.⁶⁷

Bavaj’s work represents an especially clear and consistent statement of the totalitarian thesis and all its problems. Most troubling is that his account refuses to engage with the substantive political differences between the left and right, or with the social bases on which each was built. His argument is based on a discourse analysis tracing rhetorical similarities. Thus, for example, he says that ‘[f]or the protagonists of extremist thought, the Weimar Republic appeared as a gladiatorial arena for a heroic eschatological war between two eras, that of the bourgeoisie, and that of the worker, the “proletariat”’.⁶⁸ Social classes are reduced here to discursive figures set in motion by totalitarian rhetoric with no material substance. Tellingly, Bavaj rarely mentions capitalism itself, the social system that, for the left critics he excoriates, was precisely that which needed to be analysed. First and foremost, the left was anti-capitalist not anti-parliamentary, although certainly there were instances where the KPD and other actors on the left lost sight of this important distinction themselves.

66 Bavaj 2005, pp. 73–74. Wirsching’s own overview of Weimar historiography thus stresses the centrality of the question of the left’s ‘fault’ over the rise of Hitler, eliding in the process the impact of much Marxist work, but also other critical or revisionist approaches (2000, see especially pp. 95–108; 1999). The notion that fascist violence was a response to and hence in a sense dependent on communism was promoted most strongly by Ernst Nolte (1965). For a critique of the assumptions on which these arguments rest and a reconsideration of the totalitarianism thesis, see Reichardt 2007.

67 Bavaj 2005, p. 496.

68 Bavaj 2005, p. 486.

Ironically, Bavaj's discourse-critical eye does not turn back on his own work, leaving his reliance on a normative notion of parliamentary democracy entirely unexamined.⁶⁹ The perversity of Bavaj's argument lies especially in his implicit absolution of bourgeois parties and the SPD of responsibility for the rise of Nazism. Historically only the communists consistently, if sometimes in counterproductive ways, opposed the right; the SPD and especially bourgeois forces facilitated right-wing counter-revolutionary action. Indeed, Bavaj's approach allows him to reappropriate the militant language of the KPD's opposition to the right as a further sign of the left's *similarity* to the right. Opposition to the right thus appears in the *debit* column in any accounting of responsibility for the rise of Nazism. This circular logic leads us resolutely away from the concrete histories of the period, absolving in the process the role played by capital and the parties of the Republic in facilitating the mobilisation of the right against the left. As Dirk Schumann puts it in his study of Weimar political violence:

It was not the case that the extremes on either side of the political spectrum drove each other forward, leaving the bourgeoisie in the end with no choice but to pick one side or the other. Rather, National Socialism stood in a tradition of bourgeois-national opposition to the Weimar Republic, which it radicalized so successfully against the backdrop of crisis that voters flocked to it in large numbers. While the Communists were not entirely blameless in this, they were not the chief cause.⁷⁰

To adequately understand these developments requires an engagement with the materiality of capitalism and class relations. This engagement is missing from the totalitarian perspective. In part, the problem with Bavaj's account stems from his almost exclusive focus on political discourses and his contention that similar language indicates similar politics. Certainly there are better analyses of the discursive frameworks of Weimar politics that are much more attuned to the profound differences between left and right. Thus, for example, Rüdiger Graf's book on Weimar visions of the future offers an impressive and subtle analysis of the ways in which social transformation was imagined.⁷¹ Similarly, Thomas Mergel's analysis of Weimar parliamentary discourses offers

69 The same notion was also essential to the '*Sonderweg*' approach.

70 Schumann 2009, p. 313.

71 Graf 2008. He does rightly emphasise that '[t]he definition and explanation of crises is more difficult when the subsystem of politics and economics is abandoned' (2008, p. 365), but doesn't fully take up the implications.

profound insight into the political rhetoric of the period, and in particular shows how both right and left discourses were shaped by the impact of war. 'The political society', he argues, 'was fantasised as, so to speak, a trench-community in which all internal conflict would be set aside, but at the same time as an army that would manfully confront the enemy under an authoritarian, if also popularly sanctioned and legitimated (*plebiszitär legitimierten*), leader; these enemies were long defined as external. The National Socialists as much as the communists understood them also as internal enemies'.⁷² Even in these accounts, though, discourses tend to appear as detached from their social bases. While, as I will discuss in later chapters, I share much of Mergel's analysis of the impact of war on political discourses in the period, especially in terms of the impact of the idea of the 'trench-community', we need to think carefully about what discursive similarities mean given the profoundly different social bases on which each of the movements was operating, as well as the very different political programmes each was seeking to implement. The commonality of *language* that one might find between left and right was arguably far less significant in this respect than the commonality of *interests* forged between Weimar political and business élites and the radical right.

For many of the Marxist-influenced critics during the Weimar period itself the idea of crisis was rooted precisely in these very different social, economic, and political interests. As William David Jones argues, many of these (Franz Neumann, Arthur Rosenberg, Ruth Fischer, Karl Korsch, Otto Rühle, Herbert Marcuse, Theodor Adorno, and Max Horkheimer) subsequently turned to variations of the totalitarian thesis, but rather than posing left and right as alternatives to a liberal democratic norm, they saw totalitarian impulses embedded in liberal democracy itself.⁷³ The idea of the administered society put forward by Horkheimer and Adorno, for example, identified shared totalitarian tendencies in fascism, Soviet communism, and liberal democracies; as they famously put it, 'Enlightenment is totalitarian'.⁷⁴

These perspectives thus break from what has become the dominant interpretation of totalitarianism that serves to rescue a normative liberal democratic order. In this book, then, I seek out theorists, artists, and political actors from the Weimar period whose work opened up similar critical perspectives, refusing normative models of liberal democracy that we see in both the *Sonderweg* and totalitarian approaches, while also seeking alternatives to the reductive politics that came to dominate much of the revolutionary left. In developing

72 Mergel 2005, p. 101. The italicised text is in English in the original.

73 Jones 1999.

74 Horkheimer and Adorno 2002, p. 4.

historical materialist understandings of Weimar crises as concrete expressions of the crises endemic to capitalism, the thinkers and actors whom I discuss produced political projects that were attuned to the moments of both danger and hope that these crises opened up. The totalitarian approach to Weimar history tends to foreclose such considerations, seeing all conceptions of social transformation at best as utopian dreams, at worst as endorsements of violent repression.

The continued influence of these dominant historiographical perspectives has meant that the political upheavals of 1918–19 are rarely given the space that they warrant. Thus, a recent book dubs the upheavals the ‘forgotten revolution’.⁷⁵ This is somewhat of an overstatement, since interest in these events has frequently been rekindled, most strongly in subsequent periods of crisis or resurgence of the left; it is arguably the current crisis that has prompted a number of new assessments.⁷⁶ Werner Bramke, author of one of these new studies, puts forward an argument similar to mine. He stresses that what writing there has been on the revolutionary period tends to downplay the possibilities that existed for outcomes other than a fragile parliamentary republic or an authoritarian repression. These authors contend that the SPD had little choice but to turn to the military and the *Freikorps* to cement the new Republic, faced as they were by anti-democratic forces.⁷⁷ However, Bramke argues, very different models of democratic practice were available, most notably in the strong humanist current running through the radical left and parts of the radical council movement.⁷⁸ Rosa Luxemburg is a key figure in such alternative accounts, with her resolute opposition to the reformist tendencies that had come to dominate German social democracy combined with a suspicion of Leninist vanguardism. This book aims to contribute to the exploration of alternative possibilities for the revolutionary left in the period, while remaining attentive to the neglected role of the politics of degeneration and embodiment that, as I have noted, is rarely addressed by those engaging with the left.

The Frankfurt School approach to totalitarianism provides important resources for anyone seeking to escape the reductive perspective that dominates studies of the Weimar period, especially in the stress that members of the School placed on the importance of culture to modern capitalist societies.

⁷⁵ Gallus 2010.

⁷⁶ Some important recent works include Gallus 2010; Beutin, Beutin and Müller-Beck 2010; Plener 2009; Hoffrogge 2008. More broadly, interest in worker-driven movements is reflected in Ness and Azzellini 2011.

⁷⁷ Bramke 2010, p. 28.

⁷⁸ Bramke 2010, pp. 20–27.

The idea of the 'culture industry' provided Adorno and Horkheimer with the conceptual framework through which they could understand not only all modern social systems, but also the decisive failure of emancipatory working-class movements. Modernity was characterised by an engineered and managed consciousness governed by instrumental rationality in which alienation was total, a system that 'endlessly cheats its consumers out of what it endlessly promises'.⁷⁹ This culture does not produce a false consciousness; instead it produces 'the compulsive imitation by consumers of cultural commodities which, at the same time, they recognize as false'.⁸⁰ This commodification of culture produces a suffocating atmosphere in which ideas of emancipation are reabsorbed back in the service of this totalising system; '[a]ny intellectual resistance it encounters merely increases its strength'.⁸¹

For Adorno and Horkheimer, then, writing in the 1940s, the promise of Weimar had been negated by the Nazi experience, and particularly by Auschwitz. For Adorno, this meant that the promise of the avant-garde, of an autonomous art that offered a radical alternative to the culture industry, had likewise failed. It was only in the esoteric work of an Arnold Schoenberg or Samuel Beckett that art could still maintain a critical stance, if only of a wholly negative character.⁸² In this reading, Weimar's emancipatory possibilities were possibly false, certainly fleeting. What then can be extracted from the Weimar experience, not only in terms of the radical politics of the period, but also of the attempts to produce a radical art or culture that opened out onto, and indeed sought to fuse with, those emancipatory social movements? While Adorno's argument presents a challenge that cannot easily be discounted, I want to resist its pull, at least in part. In the utopian imaginings of the Weimar period, I will argue, we can find resources for a culture and politics that challenges a normative liberal democratic perspective in which capitalism disappears from view, but also offers alternatives to the increasingly rigid culture of the Stalinised KPD. Weimar theorists themselves, I will argue, provide us with tools for thinking through these issues. Walter Benjamin, whose influence on

79 Horkheimer and Adorno 2002, p. 111.

80 Horkheimer and Adorno 2002, p. 136.

81 Horkheimer and Adorno 2002, p. 3. It is precisely through its commodification, they argue, that culture takes its central role at the heart of capitalist modernity. 'Culture is a paradoxical commodity. It is so completely subject to the law of exchange that it is no longer exchanged; it is so blindly equated with use that it can no longer be used. For this reason it merges with the advertisement. The more meaningless that latter appears under monopoly, the more omnipotent culture becomes' (p. 131).

82 See especially Adorno 1997.

Adorno was profound even while they ultimately differed in significant ways, is the most notable of the thinkers whose work will inform what follows.⁸³

As I suggested earlier, the cultural and political issues outlined in this historical and historiographical overview are further complicated by what I have been calling the politics of embodiment. To imagine a different social order was at once to imagine a new human, but such visions were often corrupted as a result of their repetition of conventional and repressive notions of the body. Indeed, in many respects the lack of a critical politics of the body allowed the radical right the space to mobilise effectively around a body politics, their violently repressive and yet dynamic reconfiguring of the social order taking the *Volkskörper* as their explicit starting point. However, as I will argue at length throughout the book, there were many exceptions to be found in the radical cultures of the period in which an emancipatory politics was imagined through critical engagements with the body – and often through a challenge to the dominant logic of degeneration. One of the failings of so many Marxist forms of politics and critique in the period was the unwillingness to engage with these issues in a substantive way; these failings, I will argue, go a long way to explaining the political dynamics of the period. In the next section, then, I will outline a historical materialist approach to the politics of embodiment that will provide the framework for a theorisation of degeneration as a central element in the cultural logic of capitalism, as well as a more concrete sense of the role of a politics of degeneration in the Weimar period itself.

1.3 Degeneration, Embodiment, and the Politics of Culture: A Marxist Perspective

If dreams of a unified *Volkskörper* shaped political discourses during the Weimar period, it was in the cultural realm that some of the most vivid visions of this body were articulated. This was especially the case with bodies configured as degenerate according to the dominant logic of social hygiene and eugenics. The modern *Volkskörper* was depicted most often as urban, with images of cities proliferating in Weimar art and mass culture. Berlin in particular was figured as the locus of German modernity, often as a threatening space, but also as the site of new promise. These imagined cities were populated by

83 The debates over this relationship are extensive, with the best accounts remaining those of Susan Buck-Morss (1977 and 1989). Benjamin is himself often considered a Frankfurt School theorist, although both his lack of a strong institutional affiliation and his theoretical differences from his colleagues meant that he remained on the fringes of the School.

a host of often grotesque bodies, with prostitutes jostling for space with disabled war veterans and overstuffed bourgeois men, and the city itself often tilting and whirring in unnatural ways. Especially in the work of Expressionism, Dada, and the *neue Sachlichkeit*, movements that I will consider at length in later chapters, these urban landscapes were often intended as social criticism, evocations of the alienated state of modern life.

It was not only in radical art that these images recurred, however, but also in the mass culture of the day, most famously in urban street films, as well as in a wide range of other forms, including the scientific, medical, and sociological literature on which theories of degeneration were built. Frequently the city was treated as a threatening space teeming with potentially degenerate bodies. Given this propensity to read the modern landscape through the lens of the (degenerate) body, how can we then read representations of and engagements with these bodies critically? What implications flowed from these obsessions with the grotesque? In what ways did the politics of the embodiment ground political contestations in the period? How, finally, could an emancipatory politics be built in opposition to the practices of marginalisation that constructed these bodies as grotesque?

For the left, as I have indicated, these questions held a special interest given that they were so often configured as a primary source of degeneration. Thus, as we saw with Nordau, the threat of political radicalism underlay his proliferating catalogue of degenerates. Drawing on the work of the famed Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso, Nordau argued:

In view of Lombroso's researches, it can scarcely be doubted that the writings and acts of revolutionists and anarchists are also attributable to degeneracy. The degenerate is incapable of adapting himself to existing circumstances... He therefore rebels against conditions and views of things which he necessarily feels to be painful, chiefly because they impose upon him the duty of self-control, of which he is incapable on account of his organic weakness of will. Thus he becomes an improver of the world, and devises plans for making mankind happy, which, without exception, are conspicuous quite as much by their fervent philanthropy, and often pathetic sincerity, as by their absurdity and monstrous ignorance of all real relations.⁸⁴

Resistance to 'existing conditions' is thus translated out of the political realm and reread as pathology. This is the same process, Nordau argues, that we find

84 Nordau 1993, p. 22.

in modern art and its concern with fragmentation and contradiction. 'The healthy mind', he contends, 'suppresses the representations which are contradictory to, or not rationally connected with, the first perception. This the weak-minded cannot do'.⁸⁵ Modernist art, with its development of an aesthetics of fragmentation in opposition to classical realism, thus became a paradigmatic case of this weak-mindedness, and helps to explain Nordau's rather strange tendency, one common to theorists of degeneration, to use the traits of characters in the works of modernist writers like Ibsen as direct evidence of degeneracy in modern life.

The pathologisation of political radicalism was directed almost exclusively at the left, and intensified over the course of the Weimar period. Writing in 1921 as the post-War revolutionary wave was slowly being repressed, Hans Brennecke offered a medical and psychiatric evaluation of revolutionaries as degenerate. A study of the revolutionary events in Munich, he claimed, found that 16 of 56 leaders were 'ethically-defective and fanatical psychopaths, less worthy, and mentally deficient', while his own forensic psychological examination of three leaders of the Hamburg revolts in 1919 found 'one a mentally deficient psychopath, the second an hysterical degenerate, the third a psychopathic alcoholic'.⁸⁶ In 1927 in his work on *Crime as Illness*, Georg Bonne argued more broadly that '[i]t is now entirely clear that the more egocentric, the more asocial people we have in a state, the more this state is in danger of dissolution, decay, the onset of chaos, of Bolshevism'.⁸⁷ Bonne's approach is an excellent example of the logic of the *Volkskörper*, with the health or degeneracy of the individual directly expressive of the health of the social body as a whole. As we shall see, especially in the third chapter, attacks on the left were frequently configured in these terms, and psychiatrists and other medical professionals played a significant role in institutionalising revolutionaries.

Theories of degeneration, I will argue in this section, were not simply about the pathologisation of the left, but about the management of the broader contradictions of capitalist modernity. This is where a Marxist approach to culture and the politics of embodiment begins. If we look at Nordau's account, we can see a clear starting point. 'Health', he argued in the quote above, is about *suppressing* contradictions, maintaining bodily and subjective integrity in the face of the fragmenting impacts of modern life. *Social* contradictions were thereby displaced onto bodies and psyches, read as expressions of racialised, gendered, or classed pathologies evident as 'normal' and 'abnormal' forms of embodiment.

85 Nordau 1993, p. 65.

86 Quoted in Hahnemann 2009, p. 42.

87 Bonne 1927, p. 14.

Thus, as William Greenslade argues in his study of degeneration and the English novel:

Degeneration was at the root of what was, in part, an enabling strategy by which the conventional and respectable classes could justify and articulate their hostility to the deviant, the diseased and the subversive. At times when the social order was under particular pressure . . . the pathological element in the discourses of social panic was pressed into service to undermine the intentionality of the oppositional voice, by rendering it as irrational or 'sick' – whether it was the voice of organised labour, Jewish immigrants or psychoanalysis.⁸⁸

The power of ideas of degeneration lay in their recognition of the energies generated by the social contradictions of capitalist modernity, energies that the theorists of degeneration sought to co-opt and redirect back into the service of repression. 'Deviant' bodies and subjectivities bore the brunt of this repression, offering sites at which the social order could repair itself. As I have noted, the left often lacked the critical tools to respond to this logic, and even participated in many ways in its elaboration. However, it is not as if critical tools did not exist. If we read Marx's analysis of capitalism carefully, for example, we can find rich resources for a critical understanding of the body in which the logic of degeneration is read as a fundamental characteristic of capitalist society. These elements of Marx's thought have often been ignored or suppressed on the left, although they animate a range of recent critical Marxist work.⁸⁹

Of Marxists who took up these challenges in the Weimar period perhaps the best known was Wilhelm Reich, whose writings on sexuality stressed the extent to which repression and bodily self-denial were 'harmful, lifeless, stupid and reactionary',⁹⁰ and who thus saw sexual liberation as a cornerstone for revolutionary politics. Others, including Walter Benjamin, were likewise attuned to the embodied dimensions of the culture and politics of capitalist modernity. Often, though, as I will discuss at length in the book, critical engagements with the politics of embodiment in the Weimar period came from outside the Marxist tradition, from anarchists, feminists, anti-imperialists, and those challenging dominant perspectives around sexuality, disability, and race. It was in the cultural realm where we can find some of the most explicit engagements

88 Greenslade 1994, p. 2.

89 Notable examples on which I draw in what follows include Federici 2004; Hennessy 2000; McNally 2001 and 2011.

90 'What is Class Consciousness?' [1934], in Reich 1966, p. 292.

with this politics of embodiment, and with the idea that a revolutionary politics would have to begin with bodily liberation. In this section, then, I will return to Marx to set out the framework for the critical theory of the body that I will elaborate in this book. In the process, I will also suggest that in engaging with the body, Marx also conceives of it in aesthetic terms, a crucial connection that I will foreground throughout the book. I will then turn to some of the ways in which, in the Weimar context, ideas of social hygiene and eugenics replicated the capitalist logic of degeneration – and I will argue that they did this most obviously when they configured the left as threat. I end by reconsidering the idea of bodily liberation, drawing on more recent theorists as a way of conceptualising a revolutionary politics of embodiment.

The approach to the politics of embodiment on which this book is founded has its roots in Marx's own work. Indeed, by grounding his analyses in social processes, Marx offered a continuing challenge to later, biologically-determinist theories of degeneration. The role of the body in his theorisation of capitalism was evident at a number of levels. Most fundamentally, this comes from his understanding of nature. In the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (*EPM*) Marx challenged idealist conceptions of a radical separation of human and natural being, arguing that '[a] being which does not have its nature outside itself is not a *natural* being, and plays no part in the system of nature'.⁹¹ The human is thus constituted through nature, a relationship that, in *Capital*, is tied directly to labour. Here Marx uses the biological metaphor of a 'social metabolism' [*Stoffwechsel*]⁹² as a way of conceptualising the labour process.

Labour is, first of all, a process between man and nature, a process by which man, through his own actions, mediates, regulates and controls the metabolism between himself and nature. He confronts the materials of nature as a force of nature. He sets in motion the natural forces which belong to his own body, his arms, legs, head and hands, in order to appropriate the materials of nature in a form adapted to his own needs. Through this movement he acts upon external nature and changes it, and in this way he simultaneously changes his own nature.⁹³

The labour process in Marx's account is thus rooted in this bodily, metabolic dialectic with(in) nature which, in its initial forms, involves the production of

91 Marx 1964, p. 181.

92 Marx 1976, p. 198.

93 Marx 1976, p. 283.

use values, products in which 'labour has been objectified'.⁹⁴ Labour in this sense 'is the universal condition for the metabolic interaction [*Stoffwechsel*] between man and nature . . . and it is therefore independent of every form of that existence, or rather it is common to all forms of society in which human beings live'.⁹⁵ While labour is a universal human practice, it takes on a specific form under capitalism. In this context, labour becomes the property not of the worker but of the capitalist, and the valorisation of the product of labour is split. Use value and exchange value structure the capitalist commodity, the former corresponding to concrete, the latter to abstract, labour. In this context the worker, 'the seller of labour-power, like the seller of any other commodity, realizes [*realisiert*] its exchange-value, and alienates [*veräußert*] its use-value'.⁹⁶ At the same time, 'his own labour has already been alienated [*entfremdet*] from him, appropriated by the capitalist, and incorporated with capital'.⁹⁷

This discussion in *Capital* builds on Marx's earlier theorisation of alienation in *EPM*. Through capitalist labour, humans are alienated or estranged from their own labour and from the product of labour, but he argues that this alienation has another dimension, namely that of human species being. This is a concept that Marx does not use in his later work, but it is fundamental to his early theorisation of the body. Marx argues in this context that '[n]ature is man's *inorganic body* – nature, that is, in so far as it is not itself the human body . . . That man's physical and spiritual life is linked to nature means simply that nature is linked to itself, for man is a part of nature'.⁹⁸ This is the universal substratum to human life, our species being, from which we are alienated under capitalism, and his argument here brings us back to his discussion of metabolic exchange. For Marx, capitalist modernity at its very core 'estranges

94 Marx 1976, p. 287. See Foster 2008 for an exploration of Marx's dialectical conception of nature.

95 Marx 1976, p. 290.

96 Marx 1976, p. 301.

97 Marx 1976, p. 716. The different terms translated as 'alienation' (*Veräußerung*, *Entäußerung*, and *Entfremdung*) indicate a difficulty in the translation of Marx. Sayers (2011), who does not distinguish strongly between the terms, argues that 'Marx sometimes uses "*Entäußerung*" to describe the way we relinquish ourselves in our products, and "*Entfremdung*" for the way in which these products become hostile forces working against us; but he also uses the terms interchangeably' (p. ix). Arthur (1986) argues for a stronger differentiation between these latter two terms, with *Entfremdung* better translated as 'estrangement', reflecting the fact that it cannot be used in the case of alienation of property, but only in terms of interpersonal estrangement (pp. 147–49).

98 Marx 1964, p. 112.

from man his own body, as well as external nature and his spiritual essence, his *human being*'.⁹⁹

Marx's analysis of capitalism flows from this fundamental understanding of human being that, with modifications, runs through his early and later work. In *EPM* this is evident in the way in which he describes the day-to-day realities of labour under capitalism, a description that foregrounds the bodily impact of labour, and also configures its potentials in aesthetic terms. Labour 'produces beauty – but for the worker, deformity . . . It produces intelligence – but for the worker stupidity, cretinism'. The wage labourer, he continues, thus 'mortifies his body and ruins his mind'.¹⁰⁰ These terms – 'deformity', 'cretinism', and 'mortification' – echo those used by theorists of degeneration but, as is clear from this discussion of Marx's work, here they are not conceived of as the products of a mute biology, but of the living reality of alienated human relations. The 'deformities' may be etched on the physical body, but they are in fact deformations of human species being and of the labour through which that being is created. Undistorted human being, on the other hand, is described in aesthetic terms, as 'beauty'.

The aesthetic criteria that emerge in this discussion of alienated labour comes out as well in Marx's more systemic analysis of the process of objectification, of human self-creation through labour. Human species being is distinguished from the animal, Marx argues, as unlike animals, '[m]an . . . also forms things in accordance with the laws of beauty'.¹⁰¹ Similarly, as Sean Sayers notes, in the *Grundrisse* Marx 'describes composing music as "really free labour", which can constitute "attractive work, the individual's self-realization"'.¹⁰² These themes return again in *Capital* in Marx's famous contrast between bees and architects: 'what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is that the architect builds the cell in his mind before he constructs it in wax'.¹⁰³

99 Marx 1964, p. 114. As Sayers 2011 argues, the process of 'objectification' produces human consciousness, and thus means that, potentially, 'by humanising the world, we cease to feel that we are confronted by a foreign and hostile world' (p. 17). Alienation, in which we are confronted by the new naturalised laws of capitalism, returns us to that hostile world.

100 Marx 1964, p. 110.

101 Marx 1964, p. 114.

102 Sayers 2011, p. 22. The quotes within this passage are from Marx.

103 Marx 1976, p. 284. This and the following passage are part of the discussion of the labour process. Harvey 2000 offers a critical reworking of Marx's distinction between architects and bees, stressing that this difference should not be read as a sign of human distance from nature. My argument shares much with Harvey's 'dialectical utopianism', which is grounded in an understanding of human species as emerging out of the metabolic relationship with nature (pp. 199–212).

This fundamental creative impulse is the basis of all human labour, and it is in describing this labour that we find some of Marx's most vibrant and powerful language. Use values, he says, are only actualised through living labour. 'Living labour must seize on these things, awaken them from the dead, change them from merely possible into real and effective use-values. Bathed in the fire of labour, appropriated as part of its organism, and infused with vital energy for the performance of the functions appropriate to their concept and to their vocation in the process', these use-values are given life.¹⁰⁴ This is the locus of the creativity that is human being.¹⁰⁵

In Marx's work, then, we find a profound link between labour, the body, and human creativity, a generative moment that marks the point at which Marx seeks to abolish the dualities through which, in idealist philosophy as much as in alienated life, human being had been conceptualised. Creativity in this reading reproduces the central contradictions of the capitalist social order, appearing as both the necessary basis of labour itself, and that from which workers are inexorably alienated in the labour process.¹⁰⁶

There are two crucial ways in which Marx's understanding of this embodied creativity informs my own perspective in this book. First is the nature of the body itself. As my discussion of Marx suggests, under capitalism living labour is consumed through its appropriation and alienation, a process that, as David McNally argues, is directed at the body itself. 'Capital's inner movement is to appropriate all the energies and powers of living labourers, to overcome the limits of the human body, to stretch and intensify labour to the point that it overcomes its own physical and socio-cultural limits, its human embodiment. Concrete, embodied, sentient, desiring, labouring beings constitute barriers to capital which, in its quest for infinity, it tries to drive beyond'.¹⁰⁷

104 Marx 1976, p. 289.

105 One of the strongest statements of this perspective comes from Raymond Williams (1977). 'At the very centre of Marxism is an extraordinary emphasis on human creativity and self-creation. Extraordinary because most of the systems with which it contends stress the derivation of most human activity from an external cause: from God, from an abstracted Nature or human nature, from permanent instinctual systems, or from an animal inheritance. The notion of self-creation, extended to civil society and to language by pre-Marxist thinkers, was radically extended by Marxism to the basic work processes and thence to a deeply (creatively) altered physical world and a self-created humanity' (p. 206). Williams' critique of the base/superstructure model flows from this understanding of creativity and culture (see pp. 75–82). On Marx's aesthetics, see also Rose 1984.

106 See Harvey 2000, pp. 103–6.

107 McNally 2003, pp. 8–9. See also McNally 2011, pp. 113–141.

The logic of capital described here finds some of its most notable instantiations in the Fordist and Taylorist practices of bodily discipline that were coming to dominate industrial labour in the early twentieth century.¹⁰⁸ As I will argue throughout the book, practices of eugenics and social hygiene, which themselves eventually drew on Fordist and Taylorist models, represented projects for the disciplining of bodies as they appear not only in the production process, but in the social field more broadly. These practices shaped the dense networks linking production, reproduction, and consumption, working to differentiate and manage bodies in order to facilitate their integration into the labour process in particular, and the social systems of capitalist modernity more broadly. Here we need to extend Marx's analysis, paying careful attention to the specific ways in which those practices shaped bodies. We will see this logic at work in, among other areas, the gendered practices of production and reproduction, in the configuration of bodies as (dis)abled, and in a primitivist impulse linked to colonial practice and racial ideology. It is through these case studies that we will see the extent to which ideas of degeneration and of the *Volkskörper* were rooted in the fundamental logic of capitalist development.

The second way in which Marx's work informs the arguments in this book is through his evocation of the aesthetic dimension in relation to labour and the body. Not only are creative practices central to human labour and social being, but such creativity is denied to alienated labour. The repression of the body that McNally speaks of is simultaneously a denial of the ability to create, the reduction of the worker to a mute and rationalised labouring instrument. In this context, it is unsurprising that the problem of creativity itself becomes detached from the labour process, relegated to the separate spheres of culture and art. The sphere of art thus reproduces a contradiction at the heart of capitalist modernity, acting as a repository for human creativity but in the process buttressing the logic by which creativity is denied to most. But, during the Weimar period, it was from the sphere of art that we also find some of the most trenchant critiques of alienation and its bodily consequences, as well as projects that sought to overcome the separation between art and life. Many critics and artists in the Weimar period thus held out hope that art could open up forms of social and political engagement through which a revolutionary consciousness and praxis could emerge. What that art might look like and how it might produce its social effects was the subject of much debate; these arguments will be an important focus of this book.

Given my theorisation of the cultural logic of late capitalism, we should not be surprised that Weimar-era artists and critics returned constantly to the

108 The classic text here is Braverman 1974.

body as a ground through which a revolutionary creativity was conceptualised. The proliferating images of bodies, often mortified and distorted, bore the marks of the contradictory and deforming processes of capitalist labour and social reproduction. Often bodies appear in uncritical form, simply reflecting the repressive logic of degeneration through which they were constituted, catalogued, differentiated, and repressed. At other times, however, artists and others produced images of bodies attuned to the violence inflicted on them, opening up in their representations the contradictory logics through which they were produced. It is these kinds of images, these representational practices, to which I will look for a critical cultural politics. This discussion is most explicit in the fourth chapter, which looks at the degenerate bodies that were so often figured in Weimar culture, and whose stigmatising names echoed in the discourses of social hygiene and eugenics: prostitutes or whores, cripples, the insane or the mad, the primitive. The critical potential of these proliferating figures of degeneracy, I will argue, can only be understood against the backdrop of social relations of production and reproduction, the logic of capitalist labour, and the attendant politics of degeneration through which bodies were constituted.

If we return now to the conception of the body in theories of degeneration, we can see that they reproduce and extend the logic of capitalism outlined by Marx. As Nordau says of the 'healthy' mind, the goal of this logic is to suppress its contradictions and impose, often violently, an integrated social order rooted in the body. As I have noted, by the 1920s this process of integration was increasingly the domain of social hygiene and eugenics, which shaped state policies in areas as diverse as health, labour, and urban planning. The institutionalisation and professionalisation of medicine, the growth of sociology and anthropology, the increasing prominence of statistical analysis and risk management, and the rise of technocratic approaches to labour and public policy are but a few of the modes through which ideas of degeneration were integrated into everyday life.¹⁰⁹ These rationalising processes were central to managing the contradictions of capitalist modernity. Wilhelm Schallmayer who, along with Alfred Ploetz, played a central role in founding German eugenics, played a key role in this regard. As Sheila Weiss argues, '[h]e was the first person to clearly articulate the technocratic/managerial logic behind German eugenic thought,

109 Weindling 1989 is the standard work. On the importance of statistical experts, most notably Friedrich Burgdörfer, see Reinecke 2005. Evans (2010) stresses the impact of professionalisation in anthropology's shift from a more liberal to a racial basis during the First World War, with anthropological ideas providing a crucial conceptual basis for the application of ideas of race and health in other areas (pp. 97–129).

indeed behind eugenic thought in general: the idea that power or “national efficiency” is essentially a problem in the rational management of population.¹¹⁰

Schallmayer's approach fit rather seamlessly with related practices of Taylorism and Fordism. These technocratic and rationalising approaches were ideologically heterogeneous and were appropriated by socialists as well as company managers and state officials. Thus, for example, the communist activist Felix Boenheim argued that it was crucial for the left to re-appropriate biochemistry from the drug companies and bourgeois medicine as a way of grounding socialist health and hygiene.¹¹¹ The study of biochemistry, he argued, could enable an understanding of the dietary needs of different forms of work, tying the understanding of bodily metabolism to the exploitation of labour and workers' inadequate provisions.¹¹² In a number of other areas, especially around health care, family planning, welfare, and similar social issues, eugenic and social hygienic approaches gained a significant purchase on the left, especially among social democrats.¹¹³ These interventions sought to contest the use of these managerial techniques by capital, but also tended to assimilate many of the reductive conceptions of the body and human sociality entailed by the rationalising approach.

Part of the turn to social hygiene and eugenics was driven by the impact of the First World War. The sheer scale of the War's human impact, combined with its loss, stoked fears of national degeneration and population decline. Many noted the role the War had played in exacerbating the nervous conditions seen as endemic to modern life.¹¹⁴ Already before the War, fears over degeneration and declining birth rates had prompted conservative activists like Friedrich Burgdörfer to proclaim that Germany faced a *Volkstod*, a death of the people or nation,¹¹⁵ and the scale of the casualties suffered during the War dramatically heightened these fears. It was not only population decline, but questions of ‘quality’ that shaped these eugenic responses: what kinds of people had been produced by modern life and war?

This concern with ‘quality’ was most evident in discussions of what was called ‘contra-selection’, which held that ‘less worthy’ populations were in fact reproducing and surviving at a greater rate than those of more value. The idea

110 Weiss 1987, p. 4.

111 Boenheim 1926, pp. 14–19.

112 Boenheim 1926, pp. 43–47.

113 Schwartz 1995.

114 On the history of these discourses of nerves and neurasthenia in Germany, see Cowan 2008; Lerner 2003; Radkau 1998.

115 Bryant 2007.

of 'quality' was central to eugenic ideas, and was generally directed against the working class, which was seen as the bearer of inferior qualities.¹¹⁶ The argument had thus been made before the War that social welfare provisions and other modern innovations had given 'less worthy' populations the ability to reproduce. These trends were seen to increase during the War. Bonne, for example, argued that war led to an explosion in the use of alcohol and tobacco, as well as the rapid spread of sexually-transmitted infections (STIs), thus ensuring that those of less worth (*Minderwertigen*) came to dominate society.¹¹⁷ The bourgeois women's movement was especially vocal in warning of these dangers,¹¹⁸ with even the radical-liberal League for the Protection of Motherhood and Sexual Reform (*Bund für Mutterschutz und Sexualreform*, or BfMS) associated with Helene Stöcker, which was explicitly feminist and argued strongly for reproductive rights, worried about the impact of war. For Max Rosenthal, the secretary of the league, it was the specific characteristics of *modern* warfare that produced these problems. Paralleling the broader changes associated with modern, urban life, he argued in 1915 that 'in the current circumstances and under the conditions of modern warfare, war has lost any value as a "selective factor" that it may have had in earlier ages... It is above all the physically weak men who survive and are responsible for the renewal of the nation, since they are now marrying in greater numbers'.¹¹⁹

Despite the targeting of the working class in these discourses, many on the left also found them compelling. The most prominent of the left-wing writers on contra-selection was the pacifist cardiologist Georg Friedrich Nicolai, who discussed the idea in his 1917 book *The Biology of War*. Nicolai rejected the simple social Darwinist view, which dominated right-wing thinking, of war as a struggle for survival, stressing instead that war had historically resulted from exploitative social relations of slavery and property.¹²⁰ By introducing this explicitly political dimension, his work provoked controversy, leading to his demotion to the position of nursing orderly during the War; subsequently provoking a confrontation between socialist and right-wing students at his opening lecture after returning to clinical and academic practice in 1920; and finally leading the university senate to deny him a professorship, causing him to emigrate.¹²¹

116 Weipert 2006, pp. 185–91.

117 Bonne 1927, pp. 189–91.

118 Manz 2007, pp. 135–66.

119 Quoted in Davies 2007, p. 218.

120 Nicolai 1919, pp. 35–42.

121 Weindling 1989, pp. 322–23.

Despite Nicolai's politicisation of eugenic thought, his argument retained a strong biological reductionism grounded in ideas of contra-selection. The War, he argued, had a contra-selective impact in that the strong were placed in the line of fire, while the degenerate remained behind the lines: 'the blind, the deaf and dumb, the idiots, the hunchbacks, the scrofulous, the stupid, the impotent, the paralytics, the epileptics, the dwarfs, the deformed. All this residue and ruffraff of the human race can rest easy, as no bullets hiss by them'.¹²² Similarly, the 'morally inferior' were also protected, as war offered a 'life insurance, so that this physical and mental "cripple-regiment", who in the free competition of peacetime could hardly compete against their fitter competitors, now get the best positions and the highest pay'.¹²³ Nicolai's catalogue of the grotesque is interesting in comparison with the passages from Marx cited above, which similarly list 'deformity' and 'cretinism' among the ills of modern life. The aesthetic dimension in ideas of degeneration is also evident in Nicolai's account, which relies on a kind of aesthetics of revulsion to generate its rhetorical power, a catalogue of threats to the healthy *Volkskörper* coming from a proliferating series of disabled and grotesque bodies that Nicolai lists with terrifying relish. The crucial difference between Marx and Nicolai, of course, lies in the biological reductionism of the latter. Despite his attempt to formulate a social critique, Nicolai shares with liberal and right-wing theorists of degeneration a belief in intrinsic bodily characteristics.

Given the diversity of perspectives encompassed under the rubrics of social hygiene and eugenics, it is unsurprising that there were many conflicting proposals for possible therapeutic interventions. These included both 'positive' and 'negative' measures, the distinction resting on the nature of the intervention rather than a value judgement. One of the key eugenic thinkers in the period, the prominent sexologist and psychiatrist Albert Moll, described the two approaches: '[i]n order to improve the race, eugenics strives on the one hand to prevent the propagation of less worthy [*minderwertigen*] offspring, and on the other to promote the propagation of the adequate or superior'.¹²⁴ The latter positive measures included the promotion of infant and child nutrition, 'body culture' movements that organised sports or the enjoyment of fresh air, and better hygienic education. These were the approaches favoured by the left, especially the SPD, with the Party linking such measures to the broader social welfare projects on which it built its base.

Today it is the negative measures, the prevention of the propagation of the 'less worthy', that we tend to associate most strongly with eugenics. Even during

¹²² Nicolai 1919, p. 81.

¹²³ Nicolai 1919, p. 81.

¹²⁴ Moll 1926, p. 1129.

the Weimar years, though, while negative measures were attracting a growing chorus of advocates, they remained deeply controversial. A host of measures were included in this category: marriage controls, birth control, abortion, sterilisation, and euthanasia, a diverse range of approaches, each with very different implications for our reading of the politics of degeneration. Moll himself argued that such interventions needed to be approached with great caution. He questioned the Lombrosan notion of the born criminal, for example, arguing that social factors were perhaps more significant than genetic in producing criminality and other 'degeneracies'.¹²⁵ Moll did not deny that the state had the right to impose sterilisation; in the age of the military draft, when the state claimed the right over the life and death of its citizens, forced sterilisation was theoretically legitimate. However, he questioned whether or not medical professionals, including Schallmayer, were critical enough of eugenic ideas to be trusted with their implementation. He added an interesting and prescient institutional critique as well, suggesting that a bureaucratic logic could lead to excessive imposition of forced sterilisation.¹²⁶

Moll read eugenics explicitly in class terms, but, as with the liberal approach that had governed earlier theories of degeneration, he saw its rationalising promise as a sign of modern progress. Thus, he says, the War demonstrated clearly where the true degeneracy in Germany was located, namely in the old élites who dominated the military and in whom 'an especially strong degeneration predominated'.¹²⁷ This degeneracy was evident in the aristocratic tendency to homosexuality and perversity evident in many scandals that received much media attention. The political lesson here was that leaders should come from all social strata, although 'in general the best genetic makeup for the regeneration of the upper social strata comes from the middle strata [*Mittelstandsschichten*] who have already reached a higher level through education [*Bildung*] and culture [*Kultur*].'¹²⁸ Thus, while Moll was ostensibly supportive of the notion of class mobility, he saw the cultured bourgeoisie, the middle- and upper-middle classes, as the bulwark against the degeneration threatening the nation and

125 Indeed, he argued that Lombroso's contention that criminality and genius stemmed from the same degeneracies, a perspective endorsed by Nordau and others as well, meant that sterilisation would endanger the emergence of the latter as much as the former (Moll 1926, pp. 1136–46).

126 Moll 1926, pp. 1146–47. Moll also questioned whether the collection of information on citizens for proposed eugenic marriage certificates would open the door to the state 'snooping into family affairs' (quoted in Osborne 1992, p. 146).

127 Moll 1926, p. 1153.

128 Moll 1926, p. 1156. As we shall see, the terms that Moll uses (*Mittelstand*, *Bildung*, *Kultur*) all have specific associations in the German context with a particular notion of a cultured bourgeoisie that was often depicted in profoundly national(ist) terms.

race. The left as much as the old aristocratic orders represented a fundamental threat, the experience of the post-War revolutions demonstrating the dangers of any attempts at rapid social change. Bringing workers to power had led to corruption and other ‘unpleasant symptoms’.¹²⁹

Such arguments about the dangers of the political left and of working-class mobilisations dominated eugenic and social hygienic fears, and appeared in much more virulent form in conservative and especially radical right discourse. These issues are central to any understanding of left politics. Not only is the politics of embodiment central to the logic of capitalism, as I have argued in relation to Marx, but, at the level of political contestation, bourgeois and radical right politics were elaborated through the regulation and disciplining of bodies, by technocratic and/or violent means. Counter-revolutionary politics in particular were driven by an increasingly powerful drive to stabilise and purge the *Volkskörper*. Beginning in the second chapter with the experience of the First World War, and ending with the final suppression of the left at the end of the Weimar period, this book will thus chart the changing course of these political and cultural contestations.

Bringing the question of degeneration into the heart of considerations of politics also allows us to develop a critical understanding of the emergence of modern capitalist bodies and subjectivities. The arguments that follow in this book develop an in-depth analysis of the culture and politics of the Weimar period, but also suggest approaches to the emergence of the bodies and subjectivities of capitalist modernity that speak to a longer history. By integrating an understanding of the logic of capitalism and class with the intersecting logics of gender, race, sexuality, and ability, this book makes a contribution to a historically grounded materialist history of embodiment and subjectivity. In so doing, I draw inspiration from a range of other work. Before turning to an overview of the book, then, I will briefly assess some of these works, in order to raise the question of what a radical politics of the body might look like.

Reading the logic of degeneration as an expression of the deep structures of capitalist modernity of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries requires an attention to the changing nature of those structures, changes with which many of the Weimar-era theorists that I will discuss in this book were deeply concerned. These shifts manifested in profound transformations of bodies and subjectivities, as the analysis of the emergence of sexual identities in the work of the Marxist-feminist theorist Rosemary Hennessy demonstrates. She argues that shifts in production and consumption spanning

129 Moll 1926, p. 1157.

late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Europe changed the nature of identity and subjectivity.

The reification of sexual identity in the late nineteenth century is overdetermined by a set of structural changes in capitalist production that involved technological developments, the mechanization and consequent de-skilling of work, the production boom brought on by technological efficiency, the opening of new consumer markets, and the eventual development of a widespread consumer culture. A new and growing mass media, including the advertising industry, displaced unmet needs into new desires and offered the promise of compensatory pleasures, or at least the promise of compensatory pleasure in the form of commodity consumption . . . Most significantly, the position of the desiring subject was gradually being opened to women who would eventually be recruited as the ideal and consummate consumers. Related to the formation of new desiring subjects was the emergence of the new identities hetero- and homosexual.¹³⁰

As we shall see, Weimar Germany is often held up as a paradigmatic example of these changes. The pleasures and dangers of the consumer economy and mass media were evident in the period, with the ‘new woman’ (*neue Frau*) becoming a key symbol of this new age. Weimar Berlin also remains famous for its vibrant gay, lesbian, and trans subcultures and political movements, while the field of sexology, which did much to both legitimise and fix the identities of which Hennessey writes, found its voice in the period. These developments were celebrated, but also vilified from a variety of perspectives. The economic changes that Hennessey describes drove the emergence of reactionary moralities associated with new class fractions, most notably proletarianised white-collar workers, whose precarious social position led them to adopt reactionary political attitudes. As Klaus Theweleit puts it, ‘[a]sceticism and new moralities always seem to emerge from the groups [Norbert] Elias calls “strata fighting on two fronts”. The power of such strata extends only downward; it is used against the sexuality of the general population rather than against the immorality of rulers.’¹³¹

This new morality thus emerged out of the changing contexts of production and reproduction, and found its most prominent expression in ideas of social hygiene and eugenics. For those who spoke of the health of the *Volkskörper*,

130 Hennessey 2000, p. 99. Michel Foucault’s (1990) work is also crucial here.

131 Theweleit 1987, p. 365.

it was the emergence of new gendered and sexual identities that was often pointed to as the greatest threat, a perspective all too often taken up by those on the left as well. Thus, Weimar-era trade unions as well as both the SPD and KPD often worked to defend male jobs and social power, at times relying on moralising critiques of a dissolute social order that echoed those offered by conservative critics. Especially amongst male critics, Wilhelm Reich was among the few who recognised the danger of this reassertion of patriarchal privilege on the left.

Bourgeois sexual morality fights class consciousness in his [the male worker's] mind. The right of sexual ownership which men enjoy in a class society, the power they wield over their wives and children, is one of the worst obstacles to the development of class consciousness in all members of a family. Everyone is demoralized by it, and the man in particular, is securely tied by it to the bourgeois order.¹³²

More recently a number of Marxist-feminist theorists and historians have made similar claims concerning the ways in which the emergence and development of capitalism have been enacted through gendered forms of embodiment and subjectivity, although the influence of these analyses on broader Marxist work remains limited. Silvia Federici, for example, argues strongly that, from its origins, capitalist accumulation was built on

the transformation of the body into a work-machine, and the subjugation of women to the reproduction of the work-force . . . Primitive accumulation, then, was not simply an accumulation and concentration of exploitable workers and capital. *It was also an accumulation of differences and divisions within the working class*, whereby hierarchies built upon gender, as well as “race” and age became constitutive of class rule and the formation of the modern proletariat.¹³³

Federici's focus here on reproduction is especially pertinent in examining the cultural and political dynamics of the Weimar period. As we shall see, ideas of social hygiene and eugenics were fundamentally bound up with the politics of reproduction, which in turn became a central point of contention in the political struggles of the period.

132 ‘What is Class Consciousness?’ [1934], in Reich 1966, p. 313.

133 Federici 2004, pp. 63–64.

Susan Bordo provides an especially useful way of conceptualising these processes in arguing that the tensions and contradictions of capitalist modernity are ‘crystallised’ at the level of the body. Her book *Unbearable Weight* stresses that media and other representations of bodies play important roles in this regard, but that they should not be read merely as reflections of social realities. Rather, these representational practices are deeply bound up with the material practices through which the logic of capital, with all its divisive and rationalising tendencies, is embodied. Her analysis engages with those social relations captured in the idea of the *Volkskörper*, with its focus on the relationship between the individual and the collective body, thus making her work especially relevant here. Drawing on Mary Douglas, Bordo argues ‘that images of the “microcosm” – the physical body – may symbolically reproduce central vulnerabilities and anxieties of the “macrocosm” – the social body’.¹³⁴

Bordo suggests that it is *women’s* bodies in particular that become the over-determined locus of these anxieties, with eating disorders serving as her key case study. The excessive or grotesque body, she argues, tends to be gendered as female and configured as a threat to social order and discipline precisely because women occupy a subordinate position in relations of production and consumption.¹³⁵ Bordo is referring here to the changing shape of gendered labour in the decades following the 1950s in the United States, but a similar claim can be made about the situation in Weimar Germany where, as we shall see, shifts in gendered forms of labour and consumption were rendered even more acute by the experience of war. Labour, Bordo contends, is ruled by the performance principle that rewards control and discipline, while leisure (the realm of consumption) is governed by the opposing logic of ‘letting go’. This generates what she calls a ‘double bind’ that, in the specific contexts she is examining, manifests itself alternately in anorexia or obesity, with bulimia (combining both excessive bingeing and disciplined purging) embodying both sides of the double bind.¹³⁶

Bordo’s argument thus suggests that psychopathologies are not ‘degeneracies’ as medical literature would have it, but rather bodily and psychic expressions or ‘crystallisations’ of a cultural logic. Throughout this book, then, we will encounter various bodies that, in different ways, can be read as crystallising aspects of Weimar culture. In that culture, we can clearly see Bordo’s contention that women’s bodies are especially prominent as vehicles for the expression of social anxieties and contradictions at work, but we can also see these

134 Bordo 1993, p. 186.

135 Bordo 1993, pp. 204–12.

136 Bordo 1993, pp. 198–202.

anxieties and contradictions crystallised in a host of other normative and non-normative bodies. In the 'healthy' bodies grounding ideas of the *Volkskörper*, and especially strongly in the armoured bodies of the radical right that we will encounter in the next chapter, what is embodied are repressive and often violent social ideals.

Pierre Bourdieu's concept of 'cultural capital' captures important aspects of how culture comes to be embodied. Cultural capital, he argues, is distinct from economic and social capital.

Most of the properties of cultural capital can be deduced from the fact that, in its fundamental state, it is linked to the body and presupposes embodiment. The accumulation of cultural capital in the embodied state, i.e., in the form of what is called culture, cultivation, *Bildung*, presupposes a process of embodiment, incorporation, which, insofar as it implies a labor of inculcation and assimilation, costs time, time which must be invested personally by the investor . . . The work of acquisition is work on oneself (self-improvement).¹³⁷

Here we can see the extent to which the process of embodiment and subject formation encodes dominant values. It is also significant that Bourdieu invokes the idea of *Bildung*, so central to the culture of the Weimar period, not least – as we saw with Moll's reading of middle-class values – in ideas of social hygiene.

The arguments put forward by these different theorists highlight the frequently repressive nature of practices of the body, but also their contested nature. However, what constituted liberation or emancipation was often complex. Thus, as Hennessy argues of this period, the fact that 'women were permitted a new sexual agency may have been a break from the bourgeois gender ideology of passionless womanhood, but the desiring feminine subject was acceptable only so long as she directed that desire toward a heteronormative goal in which she was not the agent but the object of desire'.¹³⁸ Here we can see the contradictory nature of the social relations crystallised in bodily form. What we find in some of the culture of the Weimar period, though, is a desire to push this contradiction further, to generate projects for emancipation from this bodily ground. At the heart of many of these cultural responses was the grotesque body. As we shall see, these bodies, so often deployed in discourses of degeneration, reappear on the canvases of artists and the products of the

¹³⁷ Bourdieu 2011, p. 83.

¹³⁸ Hennessy 2000, pp. 101–2.

film industry, in literature and on stage. In their more radical forms we can find not simply a repetition of ideas of degeneration, but a form of embodied liberation, one in which the body generates a critical charge that challenges not only its construction in repressive practices of degeneration, but also its embodiment of the cultural logic of capitalist modernity.

This grotesque body has been theorised most famously by Mikhail Bakhtin in his reading of the medieval carnival. Bakhtin and the circle of theorists of which he was a part began their work during the post-World War 1 years in the Soviet Union and responded to the same broader European currents in culture and politics with which I am concerned here. The work of the Bakhtin circle produced a materialist reading of the body that, in the case of Valentin Vološinov, rooted language and ideology in concrete social practices,¹³⁹ and which, in Bakhtin's own analysis of 'speech genres', read language as an embodied practice.¹⁴⁰ These materialist theories of language, ideology, and the body received their most famous expression in Bakhtin's book *Rabelais and his World*, in which he examined the world of medieval carnival through the work of the French writer François Rabelais. The carnival, Bakhtin argued, was not simply an event in which hierarchies were temporarily overturned; it was something that offered a vision of a more fundamental transformation, a window on a radically different future – a future captured most effectively by Rabelais. 'No matter how serious Rabelais may appear in these episodes', Bakhtin contended, 'he always leaves a gay loophole – a loophole that opens on the distant future and that lends an aspect of ridicule to the relative progressiveness and relative truth accessible to the present or to the immediate future'.¹⁴¹ Thus, as Julia Kristeva argues, the carnivalesque offers the possibility of more than just temporary subversion. 'In contemporary society, it generally connotes parody, hence a strengthening of the law. There is a tendency to blot out the carnival's *dramatic* (murderous, cynical, and revolutionary in the sense of *dialectical transformation*) aspects'.¹⁴²

139 Vološinov 1973.

140 Bakhtin 1986.

141 Bakhtin 1984, p. 454. Bakhtin's approach suggests a rupturing of the social fabric and the opening of a window into a radically different space and time. In this respect, his work has strong affinities with that of Walter Benjamin, whose own notion of revolution proclaimed it as a leap out of the temporal continuum of capitalist modernity. I will consider Benjamin's argument in more detail in the third chapter.

142 Kristeva 1980. Kristeva played a central role in the dissemination of Bakhtin's work in Western Europe. This early essay, written originally in 1966, captures the radical quality of Bakhtin's interventions, although especially in her subsequent work she turned increasingly away from the historical materialist dimensions of it. For an analysis that goes

Bakhtin's appropriation of the carnival draws out the centrality of the grotesque body in the subversion of social hierarchies and modes of discipline and repression imposed by religious authority, especially in what he calls the creation of 'a second world and a second life outside officialdom'.¹⁴³ He argues that 'it is precisely the material bodily image that is exaggerated to disproportionate dimensions' in the grotesque.¹⁴⁴ The subversive potential of the grotesque body, what he calls its 'generating lower stratum',¹⁴⁵ is rooted in the fact that bodies are not inert, but are constituted through and by social relations of domination, meaning that they also hold the potential for their reversal. While Bourdieu's reading of cultural capital, Bordo's theorisation of bodies as the crystallisation of culture, and Hennessy's interpretation of sexual identity and subjectivity are rooted firmly in capitalist modernity, they retain an affinity with Bakhtin's analysis in drawing out the extent to which bodily performance is expressive of broader social contradictions and the possibilities of subversion. For Bakhtin, transgressive bodily performances thus offered profoundly important forms of resistance to and reworking of hegemonic social relations, with humour especially important for Bakhtin in this respect. The revaluation of values performed by the grotesque body in carnival was celebratory but also emancipatory, the dissolution of rigid bodily boundaries signalling a rupture in the social order marked by laughter. It is this quality that Rabelais captures, and that makes him 'more closely and essentially linked to popular sources' than other writers of his era.¹⁴⁶

Bakhtin's work may have been about the medieval carnival, but it also needs to be read against the backdrop of his own time, in relation to the Soviet Union under Stalin, and European culture and society more broadly. Under such social conditions, both Soviet communism and capitalism, the popular carnival is no longer a viable social form, co-opted into a repressive and alienated mass culture. Nevertheless, Bakhtin argues, some writers still channel this popular energy, among them the Weimar-era writers Thomas Mann and Bertolt Brecht, who I will discuss in later chapters.¹⁴⁷ Mann's 1911 novella *Death in Venice*, written on the eve of the First World War, provides an example of this modern exploration of themes of bodily discipline and dissolution, although

further in drawing out the revolutionary dimensions of these forms of transgression, see Stallybrass and White 1986.

143 Bakhtin 1984, p. 6.

144 Bakhtin 1984, p. 312.

145 Bakhtin 1984, p. 309.

146 Bakhtin 1984, p. 2.

147 Bakhtin 1984, p. 46.

in Mann's work this is distanced from the popular sources sought by Bakhtin. His protagonist Gustav von Aschenbach embodies the crisis of the male bourgeois subject. A writer, he is a paragon of disciplined, classical bourgeois art whose crisis of subjectivity is enacted at multiple bodily levels: through a disease sweeping Venice, which is given a racialised virulence through its exotic 'Eastern' provenance; as a sexual confusion stemming from Aschenbach's growing obsession with the boy Tadzio; and as a breakdown in his artistic discipline.¹⁴⁸ In a period in which popular sources of creativity have been dammed by the culture industry, it is through this parable of the cultured bourgeoisie that the crisis of modern subjectivity and the logic of degeneration can be explored.

Brecht, however, turned more directly to popular sources in his critique of modern subjectivity. His theatre sought to activate bodily responses in the spectator that could subvert the reified cultural and hence social separations and hierarchies of capitalist modernity. Brecht's work, to which I will return at length in the final chapter, came out of a broader context of proletarian cultural experiments that sought to enact an emancipatory politics. He, more than almost any other artist or writer in the Weimar period, was attuned to the bodily dimensions of Marx's thought that I have outlined earlier. Rather than an undifferentiated evocation of the grotesque body, as was found in so many avant-garde works, Brecht rooted his aesthetic in both a broader social analysis of capitalist culture, and in a concrete theatrical practice of bodily and social transformation. It is this focus, I would argue, that is at the root of his affinity with Bakhtin's conception of the carnival.

Brecht is by no means the only figure on whom I will draw in a search for critical cultural practices that challenged the logic of degeneration and extended the possibilities opened up by the left political mobilisations. As I have noted, there were a host of different writers, artists, and critics whose work was attuned to the logic of degeneration and its role in the disciplining of modern bodies and subjectivities. For many of these, the unruly and grotesque body could, as Natalie Zemon Davis argues in her reading of medieval carnival, embody a profoundly liberating potential.

The image of the disorderly woman did not always function to keep women in their place. On the contrary, it was a multivalent image that could operate, first, to widen behavioral options for women within and even outside marriage, and second, to sanction riot and political disobedience for both men and women in a society that allowed the lower

148 Mann 2004.

orders few formal means of protest. Play with an unruly woman is partly a chance for temporary release from the traditional and stable hierarchy; but it is also part of the conflict over efforts to change the basic distribution of power within society.¹⁴⁹

It was such a challenge to the basic distribution of power that animated the efforts of many of the radicals whose work I will examine. The threat of the unruly and the disorderly, the grotesque and the profane, produced a deep anxiety that tapped into the fundamental contradictions of capitalist modernity. Social order was reinscribed through the often violent repression of these 'degenerate' bodies, but I will argue that, when approached critically, they also represented an immense resource of critical power. If the social body, the *Volkskörper*, represented the 'healthy' order of capitalist modernity, its degenerate other could, as Bakhtin and Davis suggest, enable a 'gay loophole' to be opened onto a radically different future.

1.4 The Structure of the Book

The chapters that follow are organised in roughly chronological fashion, beginning in the second chapter with the experience of the First World War and followed in the third by the post-War revolutions. The fourth and fifth chapters deal primarily with the middle Weimar years, the period of relative economic and social stabilisation. The final chapter then focuses on the late 1920s and early 1930s, the years of depression, crisis, and the final dissolution of the Republic. In each case, however, the chapters also focus on specific themes and forms of cultural production that require departures from a strict chronological trajectory. Thus, in the second chapter I end with a consideration of the ways in which the experience of war shaped later cultural developments, in particular the emergence of a new radical right. In many other chapters I engage in similar detours in order to understand the roots and implications of the events that I describe.

The somewhat unorthodox structure of the book enables a deeper exploration of the dynamics of the period, but it also emerges out of historiographical and theoretical concerns. The passage from Walter Benjamin with which this introduction began stands as a powerful challenge to any writing of history, and his comment is especially relevant today when many of the reactionary social, cultural, and political tendencies that emerged in the Weimar period

149 Davis 1975, p. 131.

are experiencing a powerful resurgence. War and economic crisis are again driving an upsurge in reactionary and radical right power across the globe, a counter-revolution that, to echo Tucholsky's comment from 1919 cited earlier, does not lack virulence despite the absence of a revolution to combat. As Benjamin argues, though, to be amazed that such politics is 'still' possible in the early twenty-first century does not further a critical analysis. As I have argued in this introduction, this political dynamic is not an aberration, but rather is rooted deeply in the structural logic of capitalist modernity, a logic in which we remain enmeshed.

For Benjamin, the target of his critique is primarily a conception of history as progress; this is the view of history that, in the passage above, he sees as untenable. It is untenable in historiographical terms, fundamentally misreading the dynamics of social change by imposing a linear movement on what, he suggests, is a discontinuous and contradictory process, in which moments from past and present interconnect at a much deeper level. It is also untenable in political terms, imposing a narrative in which, as Benjamin argues in 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', *'even the dead will not be safe from the enemy if he wins. And this enemy has not ceased to be victorious.'*¹⁵⁰ In response, his own work, and especially his monumental and unfinished *Arcades Project*, is thus elliptical and fragmented, a form in which, as Susan Buck-Morss argues, '[t]he concepts were to be imagistically constructed, according to the cognitive principles of montage'.¹⁵¹ This principle of montage emerged out of his critical engagement with Weimar art and culture, as well as his analysis of capitalist modernity.

This book does not seek to copy Benjamin's unique and difficult style, but it is informed by his historiographical and political commitments. This approach means that the book is somewhat of a hybrid entity, straddling the lines between social history, cultural history, media studies, and social theory. Extensive theoretical sections are interwoven with the more historical discussions, although in most cases the theorists under consideration, including Benjamin himself, worked in whole or in part during the Weimar period. Siegfried Kracauer, Ernst Bloch, Georg Lukács, and Rosa Luxemburg are some of the key authors who appear in these contexts. Another result of the book's hybridity is that, as mentioned above, the histories developed here often eschew a purely chronological narrative, seeking instead to reconceptualise Weimar history as an assemblage of fragments and layers whose relationships are often indirect and difficult to decipher. For Benjamin, such an approach is

150 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', in Benjamin 1968, p. 255.

151 Buck-Morss 1989, p. 218.

necessary in order to grasp the subterranean cultural logic of capitalist modernity, and to challenge the replication in conventional historical accounts of a politically reactionary progressivism. In the third chapter I will develop a more detailed engagement with Benjamin and with the historiographical and theoretical challenges raised by his work.

The present book begins with an account of the experience of the First World War, which shaped the history of the Weimar period in fundamental ways. As I have noted, the War had a significant influence on the politics of degeneration, its bodily impacts sharpening debates in social hygiene and eugenics, and ensuring that the *Volkskörper* moved to the centre of social and political contestations. Especially important in this respect was the question of gender, with women's protest movements during the War ultimately undermining the very legitimacy of the state. The chapter thus looks at the intersections of this gendered politics with the development of the radical and revolutionary left movements that, in the aftermath of the War, challenged for power. It also then engages with the radical right culture and politics that served as the bedrock of the post-1918 counter-revolution. In exploring the ways in which these different currents developed during and, in the case of the radical right, after the War, I lay the groundwork for subsequent chapters.

The revolutionary upheavals that followed the War, along with their cultural dimensions, are the subject of the third chapter. The revolutionary events in Munich, where a Soviet order was briefly declared, form the central case study, but the chapter is framed by a theoretical engagement with ideas of nostalgia and shock, and with the Marxist conception of totality most strongly associated with Georg Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness*, which was written as the post-War revolutions unfolded. These events were notable especially for the participation of many artists and writers, and thus provide the basis for an exploration of the relationships between radical art and politics. The chapter then broadens the discussion beyond Munich, looking at some of the main artistic movements of the period, most notably Expressionism and Dada, and considering their implications for conceptions of aesthetics and politics. In the development of a radical cultural politics in these years, I argue, the body was central. Bodies served as markers of integration or disintegration through which both the impacts of capitalist modernity, and imaginings of an emancipatory politics, were conceived. It is here that ideas of nostalgia and shock are important. Drawing especially on Benjamin, I argue that these themes shaped the embodied politics that I discuss in the chapter, and that they enable us to develop a critical theory of the body in conceptualising capitalist modernity.

The fourth chapter looks at the ways in which the politics of embodiment was contested in the art, culture, and society of the post-revolutionary years. The chapter is organised around a number of key figures that recur in the modernist and avant-garde art of the Weimar period. These figures include, in the terms used at the time, the wounded, crippled, or disabled veteran, the prostitute, the insane, and the primitive. Taking each of these figures in turn, I develop a critical analysis of the ways in which prominent artists, writers, and playwrights used these figures to embody a sense of social crisis. Many artists in fact replicated much of the logic of degeneration through their appropriation of these differentiated forms of embodied experience, even as they sought to produce critical and subversive engagements with the logic of capitalist modernity. Others, I argue, were more attentive to the eugenic and social hygienic practices that shaped dominant approaches to these figures of marginality, and developed a more materialist and socially grounded approach to a politics of embodiment. In each case, I develop a social-historical reading of the contexts to which these images were responding. Looking at these contexts allows us to see how individuals and communities constituted as 'degenerate' responded to and contested the politics and practices of gender, race, ability, sexuality, and class.

The fifth chapter moves the discussion from the artistic realm to that of mass culture. If painting forms the locus of much of the discussion in the fourth chapter, the fifth engages with the visual cultures of photography and film. For many avant-garde artists, these new technologies offered the possibility of a transformation of vision with radical political as well as aesthetic implications. These utopian visions spurred various aesthetic innovations, especially in photography, although what role photography and film as commercial media might play in transforming vision remained a point of serious contention. At the centre of these avant-garde claims was the idea that new forms of vision involved the production of new bodies and new subjectivities. Beyond the avant-garde, though, these new media provoked anxiety as much as celebration, with many cultural critics worrying over the impact of these new media on what they saw as 'vulnerable' audiences. Drawing on ideas of degeneration, and mandating various social hygienic therapies, these critics thus saw the new audiences as objects of intervention, regulation, and control, while also sometimes looking to new media themselves as tools in promoting forms of regeneration.

The fifth chapter thus engages with these hygienic debates and contestations, tracing their centrality to the culture and politics of the period. The argument here is that while the left offered many critiques of the repressive politics

of social hygiene, overall they lacked a critical theory and politics adequate to the challenges being posed. In fact, the middle Weimar years saw racial hygiene come to greater prominence. Conceptions of social hygiene were almost always inscribed in a broader horizon of race, but this came increasingly to be read in explicitly biological terms, especially on the radical right. Racial hygiene and the racial science on which it built also opened the door to more radical and ultimately exterminationist therapies for the ills of the *Volkskörper*. For racial theorists, I will argue, photography became a central technology for the production of racialised bodies and radical right subjects.

As the outline here suggests, throughout the book I engage in different ways with radical and revolutionary left theoretical, cultural, and political work. In the final chapter I bring these themes into clearer focus, in particular through an examination of new forms of worker culture that developed in the late 1920s and early 1930s. In this period of crisis, when the left's scope of action was increasingly constrained as the Depression took hold and the power of the right grew, it was in the cultural sphere that a radical emancipatory politics retained some force. Indeed, the relative cultural efflorescence of these years was paradoxically a result of the weakness of the political left, a weakness exacerbated by the 'social fascism' perspective developed by the KPD.

Participatory worker-culture movements that emerged in literature, photography, and theatre, each of which I take up in the chapter, all sought to produce new forms of proletarian and revolutionary subjectivity, echoing in this respect some of the avant-garde projects that I examine in earlier chapters. In the case of more famous figures like Bertolt Brecht, whose film and theatre productions play an important role in the chapter, or John Heartfield, who worked closely with the worker-photography movement, these avant-garde connections were much more explicit. As had been the case during the revolutionary events in Munich and elsewhere, though, these links were fraught, giving rise to contentious debates over aesthetics and politics. Running through these debates, sometimes explicitly, but often implicitly, was again a concern with the politics of embodiment. This engagement was evident in the stress on individual and collective transformation in the worker-culture movements, and more explicitly in certain campaigns that developed in the later Weimar years, most notably the large-scale movement for the decriminalisation of abortion. That movement posed the most significant challenge to the rise of the right, and also offered a vision of a radical politics that, while including the KPD as a prominent supporter, forged new and promising coalitions. Going on the offensive against the rise of fascism at a time when the left was consistently on the defensive, the supporters of the decriminalisation of abortion not only expanded the scope of political action but, in engaging directly with

the politics of bodies and populations on which the right was so strong, generated radically new conceptions of the *Volkskörper*. In this moment when the right was gathering strength, the movement opened up practices of radical and revolutionary culture and politics with the potential for reconfiguring the relationship between degeneration and revolution.

Degeneration: Gender, War, and the Politics of the *Volkskörper*

2.1 Introduction

In his remarkable montage essay 'One-Way Street', published in 1926, Walter Benjamin offers a scathing critique of nationalist, militarised mass society. In a section entitled 'Germans, Drink German Beer!', he writes:

The mob, impelled by a frenetic hatred of the life of the mind, has found a sure way to annihilate it in the counting of bodies. Given the slightest opportunity, they form ranks and advance into artillery barrages and department stores in marching order. No one sees further than the back before him, and each is proud to be thus exemplary for the eyes behind. Men have been adept at this for centuries in the field, but the parade-march of penury, standing in line, is the invention of women.¹

War and shopping, slaughter and consumption, are joined in a nightmarish gendered totality of militarist capitalism. The strange juxtaposition of soldiers and shoppers is perhaps less surprising if we remember that Benjamin later looked at the Paris arcades – the forerunners of the department store – as the ur-form of early twentieth-century capitalism. Mass society, for Benjamin, was deeply rooted in emerging practices of consumption, his Marxism encompassing that increasingly important sphere in addition to the traditional focus on relations of production. In this 1926 passage, though, he has more recent and specific forms of consumption in mind. The queue, the 'parade-march of penury', was an innovation emerging out of the severe shortages of the War. Benjamin's parallel between the artillery barrages and department stores was thus more than allegorical; the regimented destruction of war *was* directly linked to the emergence of these new patterns of consumption that had a deep impact on the structures of everyday life.

Benjamin's account thus evokes the specific dynamics of war as one expression of the larger processes of capitalist modernity. Yet, there are a number of ways in which his critique needs to be rethought to take the complex

1 'One-Way Street', in Benjamin 1996, p. 458.

workings of gender in these historical contexts into account. One key problem is signalled in his slippage from the department stores to the parade-march of penury. Department stores were the home of the bourgeois shopper and the growing array of consumer goods available for ready purchase. The queue, however, and especially the wartime lines of poor women seeking to maintain a bare subsistence, was a rather different phenomenon. Queues tended to form at smaller shops, and had little to do with the discretionary spending of the bourgeois shopper. Downplaying the hardship of which the queues were a product also causes Benjamin to miss the political charge that they potentially carried. Queues were not, as he suggests, feminised versions of the regimented formations of the military. 'Mob' suggests a lack of class-consciousness that may have characterised many such formations, but, as this chapter will show, queues were also a site for the formation of alternative and oppositional understandings of the War and a locus of growing protest. Led by women, these protests mobilised opposition through and around practices of consumption in ways that fundamentally challenged the legitimacy of the state, reshaping in the process the gendered dynamics of the period and, as we shall see, suggesting a possible anti-capitalist politics different from that of the organised left.

These dynamics are conceptualised rather dramatically by Elisabeth Domansky in terms of the two fronts so often counterposed in accounts of the War, the fighting front and the home front. She argues that the War involved the development of 'a fundamentally new relationship between military destruction, industrial production, and the organization of the social and biological reproduction of society'.² These shifts had their roots in pre-War social changes, but received a powerful impetus from the War, especially in Germany. Unlike in France and England, Domansky contends, in Germany the War ended the patriarchal social order. That is, during the War the family as the key unit of economic and social organisation largely ceased to exist; male supremacy continued, but in different forms. The total mobilisation of society for war, she argues, led to a situation in which '[m]en's dominance over women derived no longer from their role as *fathers* but from their role as *soldiers*'.³ While in other countries the end of the War marked a reassertion of traditional patriarchal social forms, Domansky thus suggests that the situation in Germany was rather different.

The shifts Domansky describes here were not simply related to the War, but also to broader changes in the nature of capitalist modernity. Rosemary Hennessy argues that these shifts were reflected in the emerging field of

2 Domansky 1996, p. 427.

3 Domansky 1996, p. 437.

sexology, which developed to a large degree in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Germany: '[s]exology's construction of a sexuality of desire separated the human capacity for sensation and affect from the ideology of family need. As a new subject of desire rearticulated bourgeois gender ideology in this and other cultural sites, the relationship between sexual identity and gender remained uneven, contradictory, and prescribed'.⁴ The War inflected these changing social dynamics in significant ways. As Domansky argues, material family need was exacerbated by the hardship of war, but these experiences also weakened patriarchal structures and, to an extent, ideologies. Thus, as this chapter will discuss, relationships between sexual identity, gender, and family were reshaped, shifts that were evident in areas as diverse as the regulation of sex work and new media practices.

In some respects Domansky's argument overstates the extent of the shift away from a patriarchal system, but several of her points remain important for my argument in this chapter. First is her emphasis on the centrality of gender to the complex unfolding of the history of the War and its two fronts. I am interested especially in the ways in which women's activism emerged out of the gendered dynamics of war, shaping not only the War's trajectory, but also, as I will take up in later chapters as well, post-War revolutionary movements and subsequent Weimar cultural developments. The second point is related to the reshaping of gendered social relations. Domansky highlights the extent to which fears concerning the health of individual and national bodies were magnified by the impacts of war and the transformation of the patriarchal social order. Here we are on the terrain of the politics of degeneration and of anxieties and desires over a changing *Volkskörper* (national or people's body). This chapter will explore the politics of degeneration through the ways in which the state grappled with shifting practices of gender and sexuality, expanding its regulatory interventions even as its own legitimacy was coming under threat. The sharpening of discourses of national bodily danger also gave a strong push to the medicalising and biologising practices that became increasingly prominent over the course of the Weimar years.

Domansky's argument offers a final important insight that is crucial to my project here. For Domansky, the shift from a patriarchal social order to one modelled on the dichotomy of the two fronts was especially significant in enabling the politics of the radical right, which, in its post-War incarnations, grounded its mobilisations on the profoundly masculine and militarist model of the fighting front. I will take up this aspect of her argument in the final

4 Hennessy 2000, p. 102.

section of the chapter. The radical right's militarised model of politics propelled their violent opposition to the revolutionary left. The post-War stabilisation of capital, achieved in part through the violent activism of the radical right paramilitary *Freikorps* (Free Corps), was thus tied to the broader reconfiguration of the gendered social order. As we shall see in the next chapter as well, the gendered and embodied nature of these struggles impacted significantly on the left as well.

In broad terms, this chapter will argue that the impact of the War on the culture and politics of Weimar society is difficult to overestimate. This chapter thus examines aspects of the First World War experience that had a significant influence on those subsequent developments; these will then be taken up in later chapters. The first section of the chapter addresses the onset of war and the ways in which the initial upsurge of nationalist euphoria shaped not only the experience of war itself, but also post-War attempts to come to grips with its meaning. This experience, I argue, gave a strong impetus to the idea of the *Volkskörper*, the nation as a body. In the second section, I trace the historical dynamics of the two fronts. In this section I am particularly interested in exploring the ways in which opposition to the War was driven by the experiences on the home front, and the extent to which this gendered experience shaped the increasing delegitimisation of the state. One important aspect of these mobilisations was the ambivalent and often absent role played by the organised left; women's mobilisations around consumption posed a challenge to traditional left understandings of capitalism and forms of mobilisation, a challenge that often went unmet. Finally, the chapter ends with the discussion of the politics of the Weimar radical right. If the growing wave of protest during the War played a role in setting the stage for later revolutionary movements, this last section suggests that the War also gave rise to a particular counter-revolutionary tradition that was to prove decisive in the post-War battles.

Running through this historical account of the War is a concern with the cultural dimensions of these experiences. The idea of defending German culture, or *Kultur*, itself served as a rallying cry to many during the War. Proponents of war defended an expansive idea of this culture, one deeply bound up with embodied ideas of health and degeneration linked to the *Volkskörper*, that they saw as under threat. For the radical right, these threats were especially acute. While the defence of German culture often had older forms of literature and art as its touchstones, the War also saw new media come to greater prominence. The political contestations that took place during the War were shaped by mass-circulation newspapers and film, as well as by alternative forms of

communication that developed. These latter included leaflets and other means by which dissidents communicated their messages, but also postcards that circulated between fighting front and the home front, and even the queues in which people shared experiences and articulated alternative understandings of war. New forms of communication thus posed significant challenges in terms of national and political mobilisation. These new media forms and the audiences they brought together were at the heart of Benjamin's concerns, and, as I will explore throughout the book, their influence echoed on in the culture and politics of the post-War period.

2.2 August 1914

In early August 1914, at the beginning of the First World War, the German people seemed to many observers to come together as one. Large crowds gravitated to the centre of Berlin, emerging in a spontaneous show of support for the war effort and the defence of the German nation. Left and right; Catholics, Protestants, and, to an extent, Jews; men and women; different regions and classes – all ostensibly merged to face this moment of national danger. This unity was often conceived of as a new *Volksgemeinschaft* (national community) or *Volkskörper* (national body) that transcended mundane differences and subsumed the individual into the collective. The radical right author and war veteran Ernst Jünger described the moment in retrospect:

The word Fatherland like an old magic formula transformed us from the bottom, and loosing all ties of party and sect made us of one heart and mind. All of military age, to a man, thronged to the colours . . . The spirit of those days will always betoken a culminating point and symbolize a supreme aim. It was stripped of all commonplace; an ideal was its driving force.⁵

This sense of unity was especially strong on the militarist right, but its pull was felt by many, especially among the educated bourgeoisie who embraced the War as a vehicle for national regeneration. The Kaiser tapped into this feeling at the outset of the War in his declaration of a *Burgfrieden* ('social truce',

⁵ Jünger 1930a, p. vii.

or more literally, a 'fortress peace') between social groups, saying 'I no longer recognize any parties, I recognize only Germans'.⁶

This vision of what came to be called 'the spirit of 1914' or the *Augusterlebnis* (the experience of August) had a massive impact; there is no denying the unifying power of the beginning of the War.⁷ A variety of social groups, and especially their leaders, put aside other issues and came out in support of the War, although each had distinct motivations. For pro-imperialist and militarist groups, the War offered an opportunity for Germany to take the next step as an imperial and colonial power. Social Democrats, on the other hand, reversed their earlier internationalist pretensions to vote for war credits, going along with the official contention that this was a defensive war against Tsarist reaction.⁸ Trade unions followed the SPD, seeing their support for the War also as an opportunity to lay the groundwork for future labour and social gains.⁹ Women's groups, especially bourgeois and conservative ones, but also those social democratic in orientation, saw the War as an opportunity for demonstrating a specifically feminine solidarity, a participation in the war effort that they, like the trade unions, hoped to use as an opportunity to press for social change. For some Social Democrats and women's groups, then, the War seemed an opportunity to expand notions of citizenship, whether this was understood in terms of voting reform and suffrage or greater public participation. Intellectuals, writers, and artists also loudly proclaimed their adherence to the German nation and their commitment to the defence of German spiritual values. Whatever the reasons given, there were few prominent groups whose leaderships (although not always memberships) did not come out in

6 As official state policy, the idea of the *Burgfrieden* was supported by the full weight of the state apparatus, with the Kaiser's words repeated constantly; there was even a film entitled *I No Longer Recognise any Parties* (*Ich kenne keine Parteien mehr*) that was released in late 1914.

7 The phrase 'Spirit of 1914' (*Geist von 1914*) was used as early as November 1914 by Ernst Rolffs (Geinitz 1998). Especially in intellectual circles, this was also termed the 'Ideas of 1914', a phrasing that echoed the nationalist 'Ideas of 1871' that had emerged out of the earlier experience of war with France, and that had led in turn to the political unification of Germany. These militaristic and nationalistic ideas were then counterposed to the dangerous 'ideas of 1789' (see Mommsen 1996a, pp. 3–4; Mohler and Weissmann 2005, pp. 24–27, 59–62).

8 Pelz 1987, pp. 67–73.

9 Schneider 2005, pp. 110–13. This was the case for the social-democratic Free trade unions; the national-liberal and Christian trade unions had no oppositional heritage to downplay or disown.

support of war.¹⁰ The appearance of large crowds in the streets of many cities, especially Berlin, reinforced this sense of widespread pro-war unity.

Perhaps most surprising amongst these proclamations of support for war was that of the SPD, which had retained its opposition to imperialist war right up to its outbreak. In their history of the SPD, Heinrich Potthoff and Susanne Miller describe this as a shift coming from below: '[o]n the outbreak of war, the declaration of belief in national defence . . . took hold, with elemental force, of those masses who only a few days before had been out on the streets demonstrating for peace'.¹¹ This view of spontaneous nationalist mobilisation is often repeated in the historical literature on the period. However, the argument that the 'masses' drove this policy shift with 'elemental force' is profoundly misleading. As recent scholarship has suggested, we need to think carefully about the nature of the crowds that formed in the early days of war, and to develop a more nuanced and differentiated notion of who those masses may have been. The crowds that are so often depicted as self-evidently patriotic were complex public spectacles, media creations, multivalent symbols, and forms of embodied politics.

That the crowds have come to be seen as homogeneously pro-war is a historiographical problem, but it also reflects the fact that many of the accounts that have come down to us were written by intellectuals. As noted earlier, they, in particular the cultured bourgeoisie, were especially prone to experience war as a transformative moment, and their responses were far more likely to be recorded and retained for posterity.¹² Even critical intellectuals and artists were often swept up in the moment,¹³ although this also meant that their subsequent disillusionment with the War tended to be quite bitter. Indeed, as I will argue in the next chapter, a trajectory of hope and disillusionment marked the work of many individual writers, artists, and artistic movements in the Weimar period, in many cases driving them towards radical anarchist and socialist ideas of social transformation.

10 See Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt 1989 for a collection of articles covering the attitudes of these and other groups.

11 Potthoff and Miller 2006, p. 71.

12 On the mobilisation of intellectuals and artists, see Fries 1994; Wolfgang Mommsen 1996b; Flasch 2000. Notably, as Boris Barth argues, many among the banking and commercial élite were in fact more sceptical of war, and certainly less prone to the rhetorical excesses that marked so many responses to war (Barth 2003, pp. 94–95).

13 There were significant exceptions, with some, including for example Heinrich Mann, Arthur Schnitzler, Ricarda Huch, and Johannes Becher, opposing the war from the beginning (see Fries 1994, 2, pp. 27–30).

The idea that the War was being fought in defence of German *Kultur* drove many of these intellectual activists, with Ernst Troeltsch designating it a 'cultural war [*Kulturkrieg*]' in 1915.¹⁴ The idea of *Kultur* has rather different implications than the English term 'culture', suggesting a way of life rooted in the class and educational background of the nineteenth-century German educated bourgeoisie, the *Bildungsbürgertum*. This non-aristocratic élite occupied a complex position in the German national imaginary, positioning itself as the bearer of German culture while having gained only a precarious foothold in the higher echelons of social and economic power.¹⁵ Thomas Mann's *Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man*, published in 1918, provided perhaps the most famous justification of the War as a defence of German *Kultur* and the values embodied by the *Bildungsbürgertum*.¹⁶ Others went even further than Mann in arguing that the War itself was an *expression of this Kultur* that promised a regeneration of the national spirit; the military experience transcended the mundane realities of everyday life, tapping into a fundamental creative substratum. These views held a wide appeal. While we may not be surprised to find them on the right, even someone like Siegfried Kracauer, who, as we shall see especially in Chapter 4, went on to a career as a prominent left critic, could argue in 1915 that '[n]ot without reason could one compare the true artist with the good soldier'.¹⁷ Indeed, these ideologically heterogeneous values of authenticity and cultural depth resonated especially amongst artists and cultural producers more broadly. For the artistic avant-garde, as I will discuss in the next two chapters, the ultimate failure of the War to produce this regeneration was a key element leading them to artistic and political revolt.

14 Mohler and Weissman 2005, p. 59.

15 It was only by the early twentieth century that the *Bildungsbürgertum* had become a relatively self-conscious social identity, brought together by a growing network of associations, societies, and clubs that included university professors, teachers, civil servants, writers, artists, journalists, and other related professions and social groups. This produced a status identity that was in a constant state of flux, however, with the contours and nature of categories like the *Bildungsbürgertum* or *Kultur* remaining contested as the professions and status groups on which they were built grew dramatically and changed in terms of their economic and social positions. For overviews, see Conze and Kocka 1985; Koselleck 1990.

16 Mann 1987. I use the term 'embodied' deliberately given the extent to which the ideals of *Bildung* encompassed a range of attributes beyond simply education. One's general comportment and comfort with a range of cultural and social practices were equally important, speaking to a particularly bourgeois conception of the *Volkskörper*.

17 'Vom Erleben des Kriegs' in Kracauer 2004, 5.1, p. 20.

The most prominent example of intellectual and artistic support for the War came with the publication on 4 October 1914 of an appeal signed by 93 prominent figures entitled 'To the Civilized World!' ('*An die Kulturwelt!*'). Published simultaneously in English and other languages, it was presented as an appeal from 'representatives of German science and art'¹⁸ to the peoples of Europe. The authors were especially concerned with countering claims of German atrocities in Belgium and in rejecting the argument that Germany was responsible for the outbreak of the War. The appeal is interesting not only because of the people involved, but also for the way in which it was framed. It evoked a unity of nation and purpose in which the military and cultural spheres were inextricably interconnected:

Without German militarism, German culture would long since have been wiped from the face of the earth... [German militarism] arose out of, and for the protection of... [German culture] in a land which, unlike any other, had suffered hundreds of years of raiding expeditions. The German army and the German people are one... without distinction of cultural development [*Bildung*], social rank, or political party.¹⁹

Only two months into the War, the ideals of the 'Spirit of August' and the *Burgfrieden* had clearly captured the imagination of the authors of the appeal, but this national unity was simultaneously inscribed in a racialised notion of a shared European culture, the 'civilized world' (*Kulturwelt*) to whom they were speaking. It was on the basis of a shared outside threat that the authors sought to establish a common cause with their erstwhile enemies:

It is not true that our military operations ignore international law. They do not involve undisciplined cruelty. In the East the earth is soaked in the blood of women and children slaughtered by the Russian hordes, and in the West the breasts of our soldiers are torn by dum-dum bullets. Those who ally with the Russians and Serbs to present the world with the shameful spectacle of inciting Mongolians and Negroes to attack the white race have little right to claim themselves defenders of European civilisation.²⁰

18 'An die Kulturwelt!' in Ungern-Sternberg and Ungern-Sternberg 1996, p. 144.

19 'An die Kulturwelt!' in Ungern-Sternberg and Ungern-Sternberg 1996, p. 145.

20 'An die Kulturwelt!' in Ungern-Sternberg and Ungern-Sternberg 1996, p. 145.

The German national community was thus inscribed within a broader European community that was constituted on the basis of race and gender.²¹ It was other nations that were committing a 'racial treason'. In the masculine defence of women and children, as well as the invocation of racial purity, we can see the politics of reproduction and degeneration at play. The national *Kultur* invoked by these intellectuals was embodied in an image of white masculinity.

The notion of *Kultur* at play here was a concept already in crisis. The call of the 93 intellectuals immediately provoked a pacifist response, a 'Call to the Europeans' signed by, among others, Albert Einstein and the prominent biologist G.F. Nicolai. Hedwig Dohm, prominent in the women's movement, challenged the dominant idea of *Kultur* by reversing its terms and arguing that the War expressed not culture, but 'animality, the predator within'.²² As opposition to the War grew, driven in many cases by the experience of artists and intellectuals of war itself, the appeal of the 93 was increasingly held up as a sign of the moral bankruptcy of the established cultural élite. In a 1919 book entitled *Critique of the German Intelligentsia*, the Dadaist Hugo Ball violently attacked the idea of *Kultur* invoked by the intellectuals, polemicising that in this 'bombastic manifesto ninety-three intellectuals gave notice that they no longer could be counted as intellectuals'.²³ For Ball, the manifesto demonstrated the corruption at the heart of a centuries-old German culture. Already during the War, then, debates raged over the nature of a national *Kultur*, one increasingly linked, even in Ball's critical terms, to a biologised sense of racial belonging.²⁴

Looking at the outbreak of war from street-level perspectives offers a rather different view of the *Augusterlebnis* and the idea of national unity than the one that we get from the heights of the intellectual élite, who saw the crowds that filled the streets primarily as raw material for their visions of transcendent unity. In his detailed study of the myth of August 1914, Jeffrey Verhey carefully dissects these spectacles of the street, their mediated nature, the motivations driving participants, and the impacts of events on different social strata and groups. Pro-war crowds had indeed gathered in the days in July leading up to war, but they were relatively small, composed primarily of well-off, educated young men (students in particular, including a young Hitler) who marched in Berlin and other larger cities. Verhey finds no evidence of similar activities

21 As we shall see in the fourth chapter, this appeal to a common white heritage echoed on in the post-War period, in particular in response to the French deployment of Black colonial troops in Germany.

22 Dohm 1980, p. 55. Dohm's article was written in 1915, but not published until 1917.

23 Ball 1993, p. 5.

24 I will return to Ball's account at the end of the next chapter.

in rural areas. The anti-war demonstrations organised by the SPD were much larger, encompassing up to 750,000 participants across Germany as late as 29 and 30 July.²⁵ While the SPD was soon to vote in favour of war credits, up to the outbreak of hostilities it continued to call for protests against imperialist war and for 'the international brotherhood of peoples'.²⁶ Richard Müller, who played a key role in the post-War revolutions as a Revolutionary Shop Steward, wrote the following about the patriotic upsurge of the early days of war: '[i]t appeared very different in the factories, offices, and in the fields where the mass of the people were to be found. The mass of workers and employees was rather reserved in the face of the animated pro-war sentiment'.²⁷ Support for the War, in other words, was by no means unanimous.

The organised protests against the War were significant, but more common were crowds representing a broad cross-section of society that assembled in central squares throughout the country anxiously awaiting news of the impending war. This pre-radio practice was already well established by 1914, with important events drawing crowds to receive breaking news, commodified in newspaper extras that were sold and circulated, often in multiple daily editions, to satisfy the thirst for news (and profits).²⁸ In the days leading up to war, beginning with the Austrian ultimatum to Serbia and continuing with other key events, people had come together in this way to hear the latest news. It would have been difficult to find enthusiasm for the War in these large but more subdued crowds. Max Beckmann's *Declaration of War* (1914, Ill. 1) captures the tense anxiety of the gatherings. Beckmann, who was in Berlin in August 1914, depicts faces devoid of the patriotic fervour invoked by so many commentators, giving us instead expressions of intent concern. This concern was also reflected in crowds descending on banks to withdraw money and convert it to gold or silver, and on stores in search of staples; the latter crowds were predominantly poorer women, foreshadowing the later queues of women seeking scarce food during the War.²⁹ Overall, relatively few people had the time or inclination to join patriotic gatherings.

25 Verhey 2000, pp. 26–71. See also Kruse 1989, pp. 115–17; Geinitz 1998; Fritzsche 1998, pp. 3–82; Carsten 1982, pp. 11–19.

26 'Aufruf des Vorstandes der SPD von 25. Juli 1914 zum Massenprotest gegen die Kriegsgefahr', in *Dokumente und Materialien* 1958, 11: 1, pp. 11–12.

27 Müller 1924, p. 32.

28 Verhey 2000, pp. 1–2, 26–27. This was a more circumscribed instance of Benedict Anderson's argument that 'imagined communities' are created through the simultaneous consumption of print commodities (see Anderson 1991).

29 Verhey 2000, pp. 47–51.



ILLUSTRATION 1 MAX BECKMANN, DIE KRIEGSERKLÄRUNG (*THE DECLARATION OF WAR*), 1914, DRYPOINT, 20 × 24.9 CM.

© ESTATE OF MAX BECKMANN/SODRAC (2014). PHOTO CREDIT: BPK, BERLIN/ KUPFERSTICHKABINETT, STAATLICHE MUSEEN, BERLIN/ JÖRG P. ANDERS/ART RESOURCE, NY.

Beckmann's image is also notable for its depiction of the centrality of newspapers to the pre-war gatherings. With the exception of Social Democratic media, most of the newspapers that brought people into public squares did in fact reflect a much greater uniformity of support of war, even while readers retained a stubborn diversity of views.³⁰ This uniformity was far greater after the onset of war and the imposition of censorship control. The SPD's acquiescence to war meant that their press too began to confront working-class readers with a dramatically different rhetoric than that to which they had become accustomed. In *Vorwärts*, the main SPD paper, the leadership justified its decision to support the War by claiming that the Communist International had long recognised the right to national self-determination, and gave the infamous

30 In his local study of Freiburg, for example, Geinitz 1998 highlights this contrast between the uniformity of the press and the varying responses of readers (pp. 99–183).

declaration that '[i]n the hour of danger we will not abandon the Fatherland'.³¹ Some SPD papers were less enthusiastic (the 4 August *Hamburger Echo*, for example, said merely that Social Democrats 'have to grit our teeth and fight'),³² but the SPD's support for war, buttressed by state censorship, meant that overt opposition disappeared from the media. At street level, however, many people remained highly resistant to pro-war sentiment; the working class, the rural population, and non-ethnic Germans (French, Danes, Poles) were especially sceptical.³³ Indeed, in his study of rural experiences of war in southern Bavaria, Benjamin Ziemann goes so far as to designate the period not as one of nationalist euphoria, but as 'depression, August 1914'.³⁴ It was only later, though, that these sentiments gradually began to translate into active opposition to war.

If the crowds themselves were far more heterogeneous than many have acknowledged, it was also the case that, for all their celebration of national unity, élites themselves felt profound ambivalence towards the crowds. For both aristocratic and bourgeois élites, although for somewhat different reasons, the gathering of urban crowds represented a threatening, unruly, and potentially explosive new social practice. For the Kaiser to even engage with the crowd was considered dangerous, implicitly granting legitimacy to popular opinion.³⁵ Thus, even in the case of patriotic gatherings, the state bodies of the *Kaiserreich* often did not know quite how to respond. The Kaiser himself had to be prodded to speak to crowds that assembled at the outset of the War, and while his call for a *Burgfrieden* had an impact, on the whole his speech was wooden and uninspiring.³⁶ The first impulse of the police was often to attempt to prevent crowds from gathering, seeing in any such assembly a potential source of danger. This was the case with other forms of spontaneous action as well. For example, while the authorities fomented fears of foreign spies, they also found patriotic hunts for suspected enemy agents by predominantly right-wing vigilantes potentially threatening.³⁷ Although official society had done much to co-opt nationalist movements and symbols in the period following

31 Vorwärts 1914, p. 1.

32 'Die Waffen sprechen!' in *Dokumente und Materialien* 1958, II: 1, p. 24.

33 Fritzsche 1998, pp. 3–82; Smith 2000, pp. 68–80; Verhey 2000, pp. 92–96. Geinitz and Hinz 1997 also stress the regional variation in levels of support for the War.

34 Ziemann 2007, pp. 15–27.

35 On official communication practices at the outset of the War, see Schmidt 2006, pp. 29–42.

36 Fritzsche 1998, pp. 25–26. Verhey 2000 does stress that the relatively quiet nature even of left-wing protests helped to convince the government that workers would accept the War.

37 Geinitz and Hinz 1997, pp. 28–31. Spy films, which had already been popular before the war, were especially significant in fomenting these fears (see Stiasny 2009, pp. 50–56).

German unification, there was little attention to or understanding of mass forms of social mobilisation, including the commercial press; for the radical right critic Arthur Moeller van den Bruck, the choreographed nationalism from above was a sign of the failure of the reactionary conservative tradition.³⁸ Indeed, one of the distinctive characteristics of the emerging radical right, and a reason for their success, was their greater willingness to engage in new forms of mass mobilisation.

If older élites had an aristocratic disdain for crowds, the dominant bourgeois rhetoric was increasingly framed by ideas of degeneration.³⁹ Gustav Le Bon's work was especially influential in this respect, with the crowd depicted as a feminised and racialised entity in which individuality, rationality, and control had been lost, a primitive unity that Le Bon explicitly tied to the perceived dangers of working-class mobilisation.⁴⁰ Freud was one of many who used Le Bon's work to trace out theories of crowd psychology.⁴¹ These bourgeois conceptions of the crowd reflected a history of class conflict in which the rise of the bourgeoisie had long been both enabled and challenged by crowds. By reading the crowd through the lens of degeneration, however, its social location and class composition were displaced onto a biologised body. The crowd, especially the working-class crowd, thus appeared as an amorphous, unruly, and dangerous threat to the health of the *Volkskörper*.

While the pathologisation of the crowd tended to serve reactionary ends, it could inform many different perspectives. Even Benjamin's conception of the mob cited at the beginning of the chapter drew on these ideas, albeit as part of a Marxist project distinguishing the apolitical crowd from the class-conscious radical movement. The leftist-pacifist sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld – whose writings on the War have been very influential in theorising its psychological impacts – used theories of mass psychology to account for the *Augusterlebnis* and what he saw as pro-war crowds:

The truth is that in those days there were only a few who were immune to the mass psychosis and practically everyone was enthusiastic for war. It was an outbreak of mass insanity, and an explosion that had been

38 Moeller 1931, pp. 214–42. Mosse 1975 discusses these uneasy relationships in the context of the rise of a national(ist) social order.

39 See Lees 2002, pp. 23–48 for a discussion of pre-war German conceptions of the crowd.

40 Le Bon 1968. See also Nye 1975 on the emergence of ideas of crowd psychology, which formed an important part of the theories of degeneration I traced in the introduction.

41 Freud 1985, especially pp. 98–109.

experienced earlier in the world's history and had been described (by Zola, for example) but which had never fanned such a world conflagration.⁴²

Rosa Luxemburg stressed the fleeting nature of this madness in 'The Junius Pamphlet: The Crisis in the German Social-Democracy', her famous polemic written in prison in 1915 and published the following year:

Gone are the patriotic street demonstrations, the chase after suspicious looking automobiles, the false telegrams, the cholera-poisoned wells. Gone are the mad stories of Russian students who hurl bombs from every bridge of Berlin, or Frenchmen flying over Nuremberg; gone the excesses of a spy-hunting populace, the singing throngs, the coffee-shops with their patriotic songs; gone the violent mobs, ready to denounce, ready to persecute women, ready to whip themselves into a delirious frenzy over every wild rumour; gone the atmosphere of ritual murder, the Kishineff air that left the policeman at the corner as the only remaining representative of human dignity.⁴³

As with Benjamin, Luxemburg's conception of the crowd was meant to distinguish between the ideologically driven frenzy in support of imperialist war and the movements of the left that arose to challenge them. For Luxemburg, the War exposed the extent to which social democracy had abandoned its class analysis and taken on the ideological baggage of the bourgeois society it was ostensibly challenging. There was no 'magic formula' that, as Jünger suggested, called the nation spontaneously into being; there was only naked imperialist ideology and bourgeois class interest. We can see this class interest reflected in the composition of the nationalist crowds of August 1914. Prominent within them were young, male, upper-class university students who had learned their masculinist and nationalist politics in the notorious university fraternity system,⁴⁴ and earlier in the politically more heterogeneous youth movements – most notably the *Wandervogel* – that provided a training ground for integrative communal action that appealed to patriotic youth.⁴⁵ A number

42 Hirschfeld 1946, p. 23. This comment is interesting in that it ties such 'psychosis' not to working-class mobilisation, but to the racist panic of the Dreyfus Affair in France described by Zola.

43 'The Junius Pamphlet: The Crisis in German Social Democracy' in Luxemburg 1970, p. 261.

44 Heitherr 2000 offers an account of these movements.

45 On the role of the youth movements in inculcating military values and support for war, see Ille 1989; Geyer 1998, pp. 36–37. On the broader role of education see Binger 1989.

of élite groups had become increasingly involved in mass mobilisation as well, in particular influential right-wing organisations like the Pan-German League, the Navy League, and the Colonial Society; these helped to lay the groundwork for the success of emerging nationalist and militarist ideologies embodied in pro-war crowds, and, later, the radical right of the Weimar period.⁴⁶ These are but some examples of the myriad forces that shaped the expressions of support for war in 1914. These crowds were thus neither spontaneous nor irrational.

The emergence of these crowds was arguably a sign of the growing sense on the right of the importance of mass mobilisation, a recognition that had emerged in part through observing the successes of the left. Luxemburg's conception of 'spontaneity' is instructive in this respect. She argued that a spontaneous uprising was the result of a long process of organising and learning through practice, 'through the actual school of experience', as she put it.⁴⁷ Working-class consciousness was not simply the product of class location, but was produced through workplace struggles and political movements of which the mass strike was the most significant expression. For all the claims that the crowds of August represented expressions of a more primal spontaneous national feeling, the right had, in part from watching the organisations of the left, learned their lessons, and worked increasingly to develop the social bases on which such spontaneous nationalist mobilisations could emerge.

The success of the right came in the context of the decision of the SPD to support the war effort, leaving Party activists like Luxemburg with a daunting task in fomenting a class-based movement against the War. The capture of much of the SPD leadership by nationalist ideas, I will argue, was in part a result of the lack of a strong theoretical and organisational basis from which the left could challenge the ideas of the *Volkskörper* around which the right mobilised. To the extent that unity was generated through gendered and racialised ideologies of the nation, the left proved unable to construct a meaningful alternative, this despite the fact that the working-class and left movements were themselves often accused of undermining national unity. Indeed,

Not all of the youth movements were conservative, and not all members supported the war, however. Benjamin, for example, participated in the more left-wing youth movement associated with Gustav Wynecken, although he left as a result of Wynecken's support for the War. Georg Gretor in fact argued that progressive youth movements could lead the fight against nationalist and militarist politics (1918, pp. 161–69).

46 Chickering 1984; Eley 1991; Jakisch 2012. Eley and Jakisch, in particular the latter, stress that while the Pan-Germans were influential right through until the later Weimar years, we should not simply ascribe a continuity between their radical nationalism and that of the Nazis; the radical right incorporated many currents and tendencies.

47 'The Mass Strike, The Political Party and the Trade Unions' in Luxemburg 1970, p. 172.

the movements challenging militarism and the state that did emerge during the War came largely from outside the organised left. These mobilisations, primarily driven by women, rooted in questions of reproduction and consumption, and taking place in the streets rather than in workplaces, are the focus of the following section.

2.3 Women's Protests and Left Politics

The most common image of the start of the First World War is that of women seeing men off to the front, waving tearfully but proudly at train stations or in the street as new soldiers leave to fight. This kind of leave-taking was not new, but the scale of mobilisation and its integration into mass transportation systems made this a powerful symbol of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century experiences of what has been called 'total war', the reorientation of the entire social order in the service of the military.⁴⁸ Certainly the spread of new media meant that these gendered images gained a much wider circulation, enabling them to be used in the broader information management strategies that were such an important part of total war. The newsreels that preceded films in the fledgling movie industry, as well as the films themselves, cemented this image of the connection between the home front and the fighting front. The rise of the conscript army also meant that the experiences depicted in the media touched a much broader proportion of the population. This was the context for the emergence of the gendered idea of the two fronts, symbolised in the wives, mothers, and children seeing their men off to war.

The propagation of these gendered images of two fronts was significant, deeply influencing individual conceptions of war and structuring the way in which the War was prosecuted on both fronts. However, as with the myth of unity in August 1914, it would be a mistake simply to accept these images and narratives either as a reflection of popular views or a simple ideological imposition. The massive efforts undertaken by the military and the state to manage opinion suggest that we need to consider images and ideas of war as productions of the war effort itself. The importance placed on information management also suggests that there was something to be managed, a stubborn heterogeneity in popular conceptions of the War that needed to be shaped, channelled, and policed. In this section I will look at one area where these

48 See Chickering and Förster 2000 for a range of critical considerations of the idea of 'total war'. A number of authors in the collection downplay the novelty of many of the elements of total war, stressing that they were often already present in earlier conflicts.

complex politics developed, namely around the regulation of women on the home front and the ways in which women operated and mobilised within and often against the attempts by the state and military to remake society for total war. These mobilisations simultaneously drew on and challenged dominant conceptions of gender and war; if women actually did perform their gendered scripts in seeing men off at the train, we should not assume that they did so out of simple womanly sacrifice and love of country. Indeed, the emergence of protest movements led by women soon after the outbreak of war suggests that this was not necessarily the case. These mobilisations, I will argue, reshaped the dynamics of the War, undermined the legitimacy of the state and the war effort, and had an important influence on the development of left politics during the conflict and its revolutionary aftermath.

Before turning to women's mobilisations on the streets during the War a look at feminist and women's organising more broadly will be useful to set the context. The women's movement in Germany in the lead-up to war was extremely heterogeneous, encompassing bourgeois groups across the political spectrum as well as organisations of socialist women based in the SPD. Most of the bourgeois women's groups were united under the aegis of the Federation of Women's Associations (*Bund deutscher Frauenvereine*, or BdF), although a number of conservative organisations, as well as those on the left, operated outside of this umbrella. With some notable exceptions, women's groups joined the *Burgfrieden*, the 'social truce' proclaimed by the Kaiser, setting aside their particular goals in the service of the national interest. On the morning of 1 August 1914 a delegation from the BdF led by Gertrud Bäumer, the head of the organisation, had visited the Prussian Ministry of the Interior to pledge support for the war effort.⁴⁹ Women's groups (and, more specifically, their leaderships) claimed a stake in the war effort and moved issues like women's suffrage to the backburner in the name of national unity. As Else Torge put it in 1916 in her book *Kaiser, People [Volk], and the Dance of Death*, women's groups took the position that women formed the 'army behind the army'.⁵⁰ This vision of the home front was put into practice with the unprecedented integration of a number of women's organisations into the state apparatus through the 'National Women's Service'. Social welfare work was at the heart of the Service, much of it on a volunteer basis, although paid positions for women

49 Süchting-Hänger 2002, p. 99. As Evans 1976, p. 209 points out, already before the war the BdF had taken a strong nationalist line, refusing in 1899 and 1907 to participate in world-wide women's demonstrations for peace organised by bourgeois women's groups in other countries.

50 As quoted in Binder 1997, p. 125.

did become more common over time. The BdF dominated the Service, but it also included non-affiliated groups like the Catholic, Social Democratic, and trade union women's groups.⁵¹ Especially after 1916 – with the passing of the Auxiliary Service Law that made industrial or other service in support of the war effort compulsory for all men between 17 and 60 – women were also increasingly mobilised in support roles behind the lines, especially in occupation administrations.⁵²

By most accounts, the leaders of the BdF experienced the War in ways that were similar to the bourgeois men discussed earlier. Gertrud Bäumer, for instance, echoed the dominant conception of the *Augusterlebnis*, later looking back to the outbreak of war and

the unprecedented sense of liberation once we felt that we were living under an order different from the materialistic-technological one of the nineteenth century. An order not of work and payment, risk and profit, investment and advantage, but of life and death, blood and strength, of commitment itself, absolutely, no matter what... The feelings of the entire people were torn from the moorings of calculation and raised up to the world of values: home, soil...⁵³

This invocation of a spiritual transformation against materialist values echoed the call of the 93 intellectuals. While in general women could not participate directly in the regenerative act of fighting, upper- and upper-middle-class women could enter nursing for the opportunity to serve at or behind the front. Nursing reflected the specifically feminine values of caring that much of the movement endorsed, but, as we shall see, this disruption of the neat gender division of the two fronts also made nurses overdetermined symbols in the contestations over the nature of war. Working-class women could not become nurses, but some socialist feminists, Lily Braun perhaps the most prominent in this respect, nevertheless experienced the outbreak of war as a transformative moment that could enable women to play a crucial social role. Braun's example shows the extent to which some social democrats deviated under the

51 Kundrus 1995, pp. 99–102.

52 Daniel 1997, pp. 65–74; Schönberger 2002, pp. 90–91. The law was initially designed to mobilise non-combatant men, but this proved relatively unsuccessful, and women quickly became the main constituency, although this remained controversial.

53 Quoted in Schulte 1997, p. 128. Note the invocation of the dichotomy between life, blood, home, soil associated with *Kultur* and the characteristics of *Zivilization* (materialistic-technological, payment, profit, investment). See also Siebrecht 2007.

influence of war from what had been Party orthodoxy, professing support for a strong leader and a nationalism that went so far as to accept the possibility of territorial annexations.⁵⁴

The interventions of the BdF tended to follow on from their pre-war focus on issues of morality and social hygiene that took the working class as their object. 'Spiritual motherhood' (*geistige Mütterlichkeit*) was the key phrase expressing the specifically feminine characteristics that women could bring to bear in influencing the domestic sphere and areas of individual and social reproduction.⁵⁵ Not surprisingly given the wartime shortages, food was one area where this could be seen. Thus, a cookbook, *War-cooking for Everyone*, designed to help women cope with food shortages in the context of the blockade of Germany, argued that domestic management 'will become the inner bulwark against which our enemy's hope of defeating us in this way [that is, through the blockade] will shatter'.⁵⁶ The cookbook responded to the very real impact of shortages against which women were increasingly protesting, but reread this hardship as opportunity for a specifically feminine national defence. This was the case more broadly, as bourgeois understandings of housework and household hygiene were consistently promoted to working-class women in order to buttress the failing legitimacy of the war effort and the state.⁵⁷

The eugenic implications of spiritual motherhood were even more evident in areas of sexuality and reproductive politics. As I will discuss at greater length later, it was here that fears over the impacts of the War on the *Volkskörper* were especially prominent. The War gave a strong impetus to pre-existing anxieties over declining birth rates, the *Geburtenrückgang*, that had shaped much public discourse around population politics and degeneration in the years leading up to it. These fears increased attention to women's reproductive practices, but were also bound up with debates over a German lack of living space (*Lebensraum*) and hence with desires for colonial settlement and other forms of territorial expansion.⁵⁸ The huge casualty rates and the potential threats to national borders posed by the War fed into these gendered and spatialised fears and desires. Supported by the BdF, the state and military developed a series of policy and legislative responses that included support for mothers

54 Eifert 1989; Meyer 1985, pp. 171–84.

55 Manz 2007, pp. 83–90 situates this conception within the contexts of eugenic discourses.

56 Verein für Frankfurter Arbeitergeschichte 1997, p. 731. The passage is from Henriette Fürth's *Kriegsküche für Jedermann*, a cookbook produced through the city of Frankfurt in 1916.

57 Kundrus 1995, pp. 101–2.

58 Weipert 2006, pp. 65–81.

and children, fights against sexually transmitted infections (STIs, or 'venereal diseases' [*Geschlechtskrankheiten*] in the language of the day), and broader commitments to promote morality and increase the birth rate. In all of these cases, the target was primarily women's sexuality and reproductive roles.

The left's response to these interventions into working-class lives was profoundly ambivalent. Just before the War two social-democratic doctors, Alfred Bernstein and Julius Moses, had proposed that working-class women mount a 'birth strike' to respond to social hygienic pressures, thereby denying the bourgeois state the cannon fodder it needed to mount its imperialist wars.⁵⁹ Their proposal dovetailed in some respects with neo-Malthusian fears of overpopulation, but was rejected by the SPD leadership on the grounds that such activism deflected attention from the need to improve living conditions for workers. The Party's female heavyweights came out to debate the doctors, with Clara Zetkin, Luise Zietz, and Rosa Luxemburg all condemning the proposal, the latter rejecting the 'superficiality, stupidity and mental laziness' of the masses who placed such importance on issues like contraception and abortion.⁶⁰ As we shall see in the last chapter, however, the Party was consistently out of step with working-class women over these issues, with the latter consistently demanding greater access to methods of family planning. Indeed, throughout the War the SPD proved to be as susceptible to bourgeois morality and social-hygienist discourses as they were to arguments in support of the war effort, and tellingly it was largely only over the latter issue that dissenters split from the Party.

It was within the BdF that alternative conceptions of sexuality and reproduction were more likely to be found. The BfMS (the German League for the Protection of Mothers and Sexual Reform) led by Helene Stöcker, for example, had long argued that women's emancipation required the transformation of family and gender relations. The group as a whole was pro-contraception, while Stöcker and some other members argued for the decriminalisation of abortion and a radical expansion of women's sexual freedom.⁶¹ Stöcker proposed a kind of radical eugenics that combined a certain biological determinism with a careful attention to the social contexts and conditions shaping population politics, in particular poverty. Her radicalism extended as well to her opposition to the War, a position that left her at odds with most in the BdF. Influenced by her participation in international networks of radical

59 Gabriel 1989; Usborne 1992, pp. 8–9.

60 Quoted in Usborne 1992, p. 9.

61 See Stöcker 1986 for the programmatic statement of the League's position put forward originally in 1905.

bourgeois feminists that included such prominent figures as Ellen Key, Stöcker maintained an internationalist and pacifist orientation throughout the War. For fellow pacifist feminists like Lida Gustava Heymann and Anita Augspurg, opposition to the War expressed an alternative to the militarist reading of a 'spiritual motherhood.' As Heymann put it in 1922, 'feminine nature and feminine instinct are identical with pacifism'.⁶² This idea of a feminine pacifism remained a minority position, however. The BdF as a whole worked to mediate between the state and subordinated social groups, thereby seeking to contain, channel, and ultimately repress movements that challenged state authority and the prosecution of war.⁶³

The primary organised opposition to the War came from dissident groups within the SPD. The Spartacus group was the most consistently radical in this respect, in 1916 urging working-class action to stop the War, and proclaiming that 'every war becomes impossible when the masses have a will and assert their will for peace'.⁶⁴ Socialist feminists played a leading role in developing this anti-war opposition. While concrete numbers are difficult to ascertain, Jean Quataert suggests that women were more likely to oppose the War and, when the SPD finally split over the issue in 1917, leading to the formation of the USPD, women were more likely to leave the SPD.⁶⁵ Long before this, however, people like Clara Zetkin and Käthe Duncker led opposition to the War within the SPD. Duncker, a member of the Spartacus group, argued in 1915 that women's commitment to social welfare initiatives required opposition to the War itself, thus rejecting the Party's vote for war credits.⁶⁶ As Christiane Eifert argues, while some socialist feminists saw their work with bourgeois women's groups and the state as part of an endorsement of both the War and the idea of the *Burgfrieden*, those like Duncker argued that a revolutionary anti-war politics did not preclude social welfare work with poorer women, although not necessarily through official channels.⁶⁷

Unlike the principle of 'spiritual motherhood', which re-inscribed a naturalised conception of femininity at the heart of the women's movement, radical-left activists developed a gendered critique of war that understood

62 Heymann 1980, p. 66. See also Heymann and Augspurg 1972, pp. 123–53.

63 Davis 2000, pp. 12–17 places the BdF alongside the police and the press as key institutions in this regard. See also Evans 1976, pp. 207–14.

64 'Ein Ende dem Winterfeldzug!' in *Dokumente und Materialien* 1958, II: 1, p. 288.

65 Quataert 1979, pp. 209–27. The higher levels of participation of women in the USPD were also reflected in the greater militancy of the Party on feminist issues.

66 Duncker 1915, pp. 33–38.

67 Eifert 1989. See also Kundrus 1995, pp. 104–5, for a discussion of SPD women's groups.

femininity as constituted through social relations, including those of class. Already on 5 August 1914 in the SPD women's journal *Die Gleichheit*, of which she was the editor, Clara Zetkin argued for the class character of the War and the opportunity it offered for revolutionary transformation.

There are moments in the life of individuals and peoples when one is completely victorious only when one wagers everything. This is one such moment. Proletarian women, be ready!⁶⁸

At the International Socialist Women's conference in Bern in March 1915 Zetkin rejected the notion of the *Burgfrieden* that underlay the SPD's support for the War, arguing that, rather than cross-class unity, what it really meant was that 'employers lower their wages, merchants and unscrupulous speculators raise their prices, and landlords threaten to throw you into the street. The state offers meagre assistance, and bourgeois charity cooks a thin broth [*Bettelsuppen*] while advising you to economise'.⁶⁹ The cookbooks and spiritual motherhood of the bourgeois women's movement offered no solution to the deprivations of a class-based war.

Although it was given abroad, Zetkin's 1915 speech had a major impact in mobilising women and anti-war sentiment. It was reproduced and distributed clandestinely all over the country, including at the front and in military hospitals,⁷⁰ leading to the arrest of Zetkin and a number of others for distributing the work.⁷¹ The pamphlet caused extensive consternation in official circles. In Frankfurt, the pamphlet's discovery prompted the police president to correspond with his counterparts in other cities concerning the manifesto,

68 Zetkin 1975, p. 69.

69 Zetkin 2007, p. 81.

70 Heymann and Augspurg claimed in their memoir, completed in 1941, that close to a million copies of the Zetkin manifesto were circulated illegally in Germany (1972, p. 136). Zetkin herself wrote in May 1915 that around 100,000 copies had been distributed in over 40 different places, 30,000 in Berlin alone (see Eifert 1989, p. 108).

71 See 'Aussage Clara Zetkins vor dem Untersuchungsrichter des Landgerichts Karlsruhe am 30. Juli 1915 über die Internationale Sozialistische Frauenkonferenz' in *Bern und die Verbreitung des Manifests "Frauen des arbeitenden Volkes!"* (pp. 198–200) for Zetkin's statement of defence; 'Aus dem Urteil gegen Dietrich, Westmeyer und andere wegen Verbreitung des Manifests "Frauen des arbeitenden Volkes!" im Frühjahr 1915' (pp. 201–4) gives the judgement against distributors (both in *Dokumente und Materialien* 1958, 11: 1). One of the defendants alone, Georg Dietrich, was alleged to have received a package of 1,000–1,200 copies of the manifesto, and the police had detailed information on the distribution of various numbers of copies on specific streets in Berlin.

which he characterised as 'a gross violation of the *Burgfrieden*', stressing that while the majority of the SPD rejected the call, a small radical minority was agitating for peace and finding responses 'especially in the circles of the female members of the Party'.⁷²

The popularity of the pamphlet was not surprising given the extent to which it echoed the concerns of poorer women, but it was their lived experience rather than any party organising that provided the main impetus for the emergence of women's protests. From early on, grassroots opposition to the War came primarily from poorer women whose experiences of deprivation on the home front quickly fed suspicion of the state and opposition to the war effort. As Birthe Kundrus notes, even the welfare work of the National Women's Service was treated with a high degree of suspicion by those it targeted, with working-class women in particular very resistant to engage with what they saw as an arm of a repressive state.⁷³ In some instances this took the form of organised protest, with 500 women protesting at the Reichstag in March 1915. Karl Liebknecht, along with Luxemburg a key Spartacist leader, attended in this case, and the police report noted that he was welcomed, with many of the protesters surrounding him and shaking his hand.⁷⁴ A broader demonstration for peace in May of the same year attracted 1,500 protesters, the majority women. This protest involved the *Gruppe Internationale* of SPD anti-war radicals, who reported a number of arrests, and highlighted both the official censor's banning of any mention of the protest in the press, and the SPD's own downplaying of the size and significance of the protest.⁷⁵

While radicals around the *Gruppe Internationale*, the Spartacus group, and later in the USPD were involved in some of these protests, most, like the demonstration in March, were spontaneous. They generally had little organisational support from established institutions or political groups – whether on the left or in the women's movement – and were most commonly located in the streets, emerging out of the everyday relations and forms of communication that characterised the distribution of increasingly scarce resources in the

72 'Bericht des Frankfurter Polizeipräsidenten an den Regierungspräsidenten in Wiesbaden über die Verteilung des Manifests der in Bern abgehaltenen Internationalen Sozialistischen Frauenkonferenz in Frankfurt, 18./19. Mai 1915', in *Verein für Frankfurter Arbeitergeschichte*, 1994, p. 720.

73 Kundrus 1995, pp. 120–23.

74 Frauen gegen den Krieg 1980, p. 148. The report gives the number of protesters as 200, while Eifert 1989 uses the Gruppe Internationale's estimate of 500 (p. 109).

75 'Bericht der Gruppe Internationale über die Frauendemonstration für den Frieden am 28. Mai 1915 vor dem Reichstagsgebäude', in *Dokumente und Materialien* 1958, 11: 1, pp. 167–68.

planned wartime economy. Belinda Davis traces how the experiences of war gave rise to a new social and discursive category, 'women of lesser means', that drove women's protests.⁷⁶ The category itself was complex, including working-class but also newly impoverished lower-middle-class women: '[t]he woman of lesser means came to represent the front-line soldier in the inner economic war fought in the streets of the capital city and throughout Germany... By the spring of 1915 the sympathetic perception of the woman of little means lent legitimacy to far-reaching demands both for heavy market intervention and for broad welfare provisions'.⁷⁷

As Zetkin had suggested, bourgeois charity could not compensate for the deprivations of war, and women mobilised in response. The eventual impact of these protests was profound. Ute Daniel thus argues: '[t]he subversive strategies that, above all, working-class women developed during the War to fulfil their responsibility of providing for their families turned into strategies of subversion that, in the end, irrevocably destroyed the consensus of wartime society between rulers and the ruled'.⁷⁸ I will explore the nature and extent of this delegitimation in what follows.

It is significant that Daniel highlights the realm of consumption rather than production as the locus of women's protests, but women certainly did play significant roles in the latter sphere as well. The War brought some increase in women's involvement in wage labour, although Daniel argues that this has often been overstated in subsequent histories.⁷⁹ Increases tended to be localised in specific industries and areas, with women already employed in many areas prior to the War.⁸⁰ In their own workplaces, and in solidarity actions with male workers, women participated in strikes and other job actions. Their role was always fraught, however. During the War the extent and nature of women's workplace participation was a site of profound contestation whose implications, as I will discuss in the next chapter, spilled over into the post-War period. The state and employers often resisted the hiring of women, even when there were shortages of skilled labour, often preferring to tap other sources of

76 Davis 2000, pp. 48–75.

77 Davis 2000, p. 48.

78 Daniel 1997, p. 207.

79 Bessel 2000, pp. 439–43, on the contrary, makes the case that there was in fact a significant shift.

80 Daniel 1997, pp. 37–126.

labour first, including foreign workers (many of whom were forced to remain in Germany after the onset of the War) and POWs.⁸¹

The resistance to women's wage labour came not only from the state and employers, but also from within trade unions and the left, as well as from the bourgeois and conservative women's movement. With the general support of these groups, women hired to replace men were seen as temporary to the extent that contracts sometimes included a provision for their immediate dismissal following the end of hostilities.⁸² While there were important exceptions,⁸³ trade unions were traditionally dominated by male workers and activists, and the working-class movement as a whole held to a patriarchal conception of the division of labour. Women's entry into the labour force was thus often perceived as a potential threat to men's jobs, leading the labour movement to support state and employer efforts to limit women's participation. Under the aegis of the *Burgfrieden*, the women's movement made similar arguments. The BdF's Elisabeth Altmann-Gottheiner stressed in early 1916 that '[a]ny Germany woman who thinks consciously about these matters knows full well that during war she is only a custodian for the man who previously held her position, and that she must step down as soon as he returns home and lays claim to his post. During wartime there is a truce between the sexes, and German women firmly reject the notion that they desire to gain any "war profits" from the war'.⁸⁴ After the War, these arguments provided the basis for the purging of many women from the workforce under the guise that, when their husbands also worked, they were guilty of being greedy 'double-earners'; these attacks were especially prominent in times of economic hardship.⁸⁵

81 Herbert 1990, pp. 87–119; Forberg 1997. In the case of Krupp, for example, the composition of the workforce did change dramatically as male workers went to the front, but women were only one of the groups that filled the gap, along with POWs, foreign workers, and youth (see Weitz 1997, pp. 64–68).

82 Bessel 1993 suggests that, especially given the poor working conditions and the lack of support for skills development, many women themselves took a similar view of their employment (pp. 18–22).

83 See for example Canning 1992.

84 Quoted in Rouette 1997, p. 51. See also Planert 1998, pp. 184–87 for a discussion of the debates over women's workforce participation.

85 In 1932, for example, in the midst of the Depression, a law was passed permitting the dismissal of married women with working husbands, with the SPD voting in favour and only the KPD rejecting the law (see Harvey 1995, pp. 18–19). I will return to these histories in chapters 2 and 5.

The marginalisation of women in workplaces and trade unions also meant that they played a subordinate role in many workplace struggles, providing strike support much more often than leading strikes themselves.⁸⁶ This marginalisation was exacerbated by the demands of their unwaged labour, which was rendered even more onerous by the growing shortages. Thus, while women did play significant roles in workplace activism, their most prominent mobilisations took place in the sphere of consumption and in response to shortages. A police report of protests by women in Leipzig in May 1916, for instance, describes several days of unrest in which over 100 large shop windows were broken, street cars and street lamps destroyed, and in which there were numerous injuries, including one death. The police proved powerless to stop the protests, the authorities calling instead on three infantry companies and a cavalry squadron in an attempt to quell the uprising.⁸⁷ Similar protests spread across the country, challenging the state's inability to provide for basic necessities in the context of an overwhelming priority given to military production and procurement.

State and military institutions quickly recognised that support for war was fading, and already early in the War officials began to express fears of potential revolutionary upheavals coming in its wake. This recognition of the state's crisis of legitimacy meant that officials were quite responsive to protests, releasing food supplies, changing welfare provisions, or otherwise acting to appease protesters. These responses were never adequate, of course, but the paradox was that in responding, the protests were given legitimacy, further undermining state authority in the process.⁸⁸ As long as basic provisions could be provided, the competing demands of the two fronts could be managed, but as this became more and more difficult, the state began to lose the battle.⁸⁹ Similar dynamics developed in workplaces, where, as Eric Weitz argues, the patriarchal system that saw companies take on minimal responsibilities around housing and welfare as a way of forestalling working-class militancy was also being subverted, undermined by the inability of companies to fulfil these obligations.⁹⁰ Ultimately, as Daniel provocatively argues, the state's inability to fulfil the

86 For pre-war and wartime examples, see Canning 1992, pp. 764–65; Davis 2000, pp. 187–89; Weitz 1997, pp. 68–71.

87 'Hungerunruhen in Leipzig (Mai 1916)' 1980.

88 As noted earlier, this dilemma faced the Kaiser even in relation to pro-war crowds; in the absence of democratic structures, responding to popular pressure, even in a positive way, would always produce a certain crisis of legitimacy in the authoritarian state.

89 Kundrus 1995, pp. 129–32; Davis 2000, pp. 76–92.

90 Weitz 1997, pp. 68–71.

demands for food and welfare provisions led it to be 'transformed in the eyes of its citizens from a rational institution to an insane one'.⁹¹

At the heart of this transformation was a contest over the meanings and implications of gendered norms. Protesting women may have been transgressing the patriarchal and bourgeois divisions of public and private, but they were invoking their role as caregivers in doing so. By appropriating this feminine role, they forced the state to respond. Key social actors, from newspapers of all political stripes to the police with whom protesters regularly did battle, tended to see the protests as a legitimate expression of frustration at being unable to secure food and other necessities for their families.⁹² More generally, including in cases of women's strike support, police were also less willing to deploy violence against protesting women, giving them a potentially broader scope for action; the police themselves noted this in their report on the protests in Leipzig in May 1916 mentioned above. Ideas like 'spiritual motherhood' were thus profoundly ambivalent. On the one hand, as Hedwig Dohm argued in a 1918 article in *Die Aktion*, these ideologies in fact served to animalise women, a tendency evident in the claim of a Professor von Gruber of the German Fatherland Party (*Deutsche Vaterlandspartei*, DVLP) that 'young women should be put out to pasture like cows'.⁹³ At the same time, however, these ideologies could be redeployed in the service of more radical political projects. As Elisabeth Domansky argues, calls for the reconstitution of the (patriarchal) family put forward by working-class women were not necessarily the product of a 'false consciousness', but represented a concrete response to the immiseration brought on by war and its dissolution of the family.⁹⁴

Perhaps more than anything, women's mobilisations evoke E.P. Thompson's discussions of the 'moral economy', with the often radical actions in the streets grounded in an increasingly concrete sense of individual and familial rights, just prices for food and other goods, and the duties of the state. In this context,

91 Daniel 1997, p. 172. Responding to the crisis of legitimacy, state propaganda shifted as well, with the Kaiser, the embodiment of the authoritarian state and the early face of the War, ceasing to appear as a major figure in government propaganda (see Verhey 2000, p. 174).

92 Davis 2000; on relationships with the police, see pp. 80–92, 99–103; on the press, see pp. 103–10. Kundrus 1995, pp. 200–4 stresses, however, that from early on 'war wives' in particular, who were entitled to state support, were also associated with a wide range of negative imagery stemming especially from perceptions of a profligate lifestyle supported by the state. It is important to note that the categories of women of lesser means and of war wives overlapped but, especially in these forms of popular imagery, were distinct.

93 Quoted in Dohm 1918, p. 158. As I will discuss below, the DVLP enjoyed a rapid rise to prominence in the later years of the War as the primary vehicle for nationalist mobilisation.

94 Domansky 1996, p. 459.

as with Thompson's food rioters, the invocation of the authority of a disintegrating social institution (in the German case, the patriarchal family) had a certain progressive dimension.⁹⁵ Maternalist ideologies were not the only basis on which protesters claimed legitimacy, however. War wives, widows, disabled veterans, working women, munitions workers, and a host of others fought for food and other benefits on the basis of their contribution to the war effort and the health of the *Volkskörper*. Class was often central to these demands, as at BASF in July 1917, when workers successfully demanded a single cafeteria and an end to the practice of serving better food to foremen and white-collar workers.⁹⁶ Longstanding SPD demands for the expansion and transformation of the social welfare system also had a major impact, especially among working-class women.⁹⁷ Social welfare implied a duty that the imperial state was loath to take on.

These contestations over entitlements became especially sharp during the harsh 'turnip winter' of 1916–17 when those without extra rations ran real risks of starvation and protests increased dramatically.⁹⁸ By this point, protests had become an endemic part of the food distribution process, and were sustained by webs of formal and informal communication that developed in the context of black and grey market economies. Earlier we saw the ways in which the *Augusterlebnis* emerged through complex forms of communication that linked street-based mobilisations to more top-down forms of cultural politics. The experience of war produced new grassroots communications practices through which challenges to state authority and the war effort emerged. As Daniel argues, activities such as shopping became more central to processes of material reproduction, with women's focus shifting by necessity to the basic demands of productive and reproductive labour and away from familial practices of socialisation, sexuality, and psychological stabilisation.⁹⁹ Procuring

95 Thompson 1991, especially the chapters on 'The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century' (pp. 185–258) and 'The Moral Economy Reviewed' (pp. 259–351). In the latter essay he speaks, for example, of how 'in times of high prices and of hardship, the crowd might enforce, with a robust direct action, protective market-control and the regulation of prices, sometimes claiming a legitimacy derived from the paternalist model' (p. 261).

96 Weitz 1997, pp. 76–77.

97 On the development of welfare, see Hong 1998; Crew 1998a. I will return to the implications of welfare programmes in social hygiene in later chapters.

98 Offer 2000; Davis 2000, pp. 180–89; Geyer 1998, pp. 40–50.

99 Daniel 1997, pp. 127–29. It needs to be kept in mind too that 'shopping' as the gendered means by which the majority of the population obtained goods was relatively new. What was fundamentally different during the War, of course, was that shopping was marked by

goods became much more time-consuming, but also involved dense networks of collective communication and action; finding scarce food required information. For those with money goods were available through the black market, but for others access to commodities was determined by more than simply price. The implementation of rationing systems meant that the queues discussed earlier became a major form of social life. People (predominantly women) had to wait in lines to obtain rations, with success depending not only on how long one waited, but also on how well informed one was about where and when food would be available.

Thus, rationing and queues increasingly replaced price in regulating supply and demand.¹⁰⁰ In the line-ups a whole new form of social interaction also emerged that enabled the development of collective resistance to the state. Here new networks of communication developed, rumours spread, and strategies for action were debated. The official discourses of national unity and collective sacrifice took on a very different tenor. The blatant lack of equality of access to goods threw a harsh light on social hierarchies, and lines for food and other necessities such as coal became the basis for collective challenges to the existing order.¹⁰¹ Shopping had begun to be a collective activity before the War, but what was notable in the context of scarcity is that, rather than replicating and strengthening the logic of the market, wartime shopping experiences increasingly undermined not only the legitimacy of the state, but of the market. The irrationality, profiteering, and inequity of the market was laid bare, enabling the formation of a form of class consciousness rooted in relations of consumption.

Beyond the queue other, often illegal, means of obtaining necessities emerged, in particular the widespread practice of foraging in the countryside. Especially on weekends, people left towns and cities to obtain food directly from farmers. This could involve black market purchases, theft or illegal barter, and generally served to exacerbate urban/rural tensions.¹⁰² Again, the

scarcity of goods rather than the over-abundance (albeit inaccessible for many) on which emergent consumer capitalism was based.

100 The centrality of queues and other non-market mechanisms of the regulation of consumption and distribution tends to be a characteristic of planned economies more generally, reflecting the extent to which market relations (although not the profit motive; as always, war was good for business) had been curtailed during the War.

101 Davis 2000, pp. 48–56; Daniel 1997, pp. 191–94; Smith 2000, pp. 75–77; Triebel 1997, pp. 369–71.

102 Ziemann 2007, pp. 192–95. This eventually led to the formation of peasant paramilitaries (*Einwohnerwehren*), especially prominent in the immediate post-War years, which had as one of their functions the defence of farmers against urban foragers (pp. 227–40).

networks of communication and interaction developing out of these practices enabled the formation of a collective consciousness of, and action against, deprivation that challenged the War, the state, and the logic of capitalism. The state's response to these illegal activities was ambivalent, reflecting the limits imposed by the crisis of legitimacy. Illegal forms of distribution sucked needed goods out of legal systems of distribution, thereby weakening state control of the market, but attempts to crack down led to strong resistance and hence the further delegitimisation of the state. Farmers and city-dwellers each resented the perceived advantages of the other, and both resented the state for its imposition of various forms of price and distribution controls on food.¹⁰³ These tensions were replicated at the front. Rural soldiers may have received food packages from home to supplement their meagre rations, but both they and urban soldiers often continued to nurse the grievances of the home front.¹⁰⁴ On the whole, therefore, the state took a relatively passive approach to policing the black market, to the extent that the railways ran special trains out to the countryside on weekends reflecting the surge in traffic produced by foraging.¹⁰⁵

Out of these new modes of distribution and communication thus came collective and spontaneous resistance to state policies, to the War, and to businesses and individuals perceived as profiting from the War.¹⁰⁶ Informal networks of communication generated alternative narratives of war challenging those presented in the censored media, and such channels of communication also enabled potential protestors to share experiences and strategies. Protesters were quite aware that food riots, for example, generally led authorities to send in extra rations in an attempt to quell unrest; if queues were a form of demand-management, riots and other protests were thus attempts to generate an increase in supply.

The desire for the regulation of the profit motive also led to widespread calls for a 'food dictator', a decidedly non-socialist alternative that demonstrated possible limits to such consumer-based activism.¹⁰⁷ A Spartacus group leaflet from June 1916 rejected the idea, suggesting bitinglly that any such 'food dictator' would come far too late, the 'food profiteer' having already completed his work.¹⁰⁸ Narratives of profiteering could also indirectly feed conservative narratives and elements of the 'spirit of 1914'. The opposition between Germanic

103 Bessel 1993, pp. 37–38.

104 Ziemann 2007, pp. 76–77; Lipp 2003, pp. 252–54.

105 Daniel 2007, pp. 197–204.

106 On the profiteer, see Robert 1997; Lipp 2003, pp. 254–58.

107 Bonzon and Davis 1997; Davis 2000, pp. 71–75.

108 'Hunger!' in *Dokumente und Materialien* 1958, II: 1, p. 405.

Kultur and the *Zivilisation* of its enemies invoked by many intellectuals is a case in point. Werner Sombart's 1915 *Merchants and Heroes* (*Händler und Helden*), for instance, contrasted the crass mercantilism of the French and, especially, the English with the nobility of the German soul.¹⁰⁹ This conservative and populist dichotomy fed reactionary critiques of profiteering that also frequently took on anti-Semitic dimensions.

While all of these forms of communication took place on the home front, it is important to remember that the delegitimisation of the war effort and the state had its parallel at the fighting front. As much recent research has shown, the two fronts were not radically disconnected from one another. Soldiers returned frequently from the front on leave, to recover from injuries, or when permanently disabled from combat duty, thus ensuring a constant communication between the fronts. Massive flows of letters also produced a shared sense of hardship.¹¹⁰ The information gleaned from visits and letters was further disseminated in conversations in queues or in the trenches.

Letters themselves show that official exhortations to sacrifice for the motherland never had a strong resonance for most soldiers, but this sentiment became even harder to sustain when soldiers were reading of the hardships endured by those at home, or hearing these tales from their fellow soldiers. The experiences of class inequities passed on by their wives or others on the home front mirrored the hierarchies of the fighting front in which officers enjoyed very different conditions from ordinary soldiers.¹¹¹ Soldiers communicated in other ways, for example by putting together unofficial newspapers out of

109 Sombart 1915.

110 The critical literature on war correspondence has grown substantially. See for example Ulrich 1997; Reimann 1997; Buschmann 1997; Brocks and Ziemann 1994; Smith 2000, pp. 77–79; Ziemann 2007. Most of these works tend to focus on the content of the letters and postcards of the soldiers, however, and on what they can tell us of their mentality. Here, however, I want to focus more on the significance of the letters and postcards as an alternative medium that engaged with and challenged dominant forms of community formation and state control.

111 Accounts of these letters suggest that it is difficult to generalise to any significant degree, with opinion of the War and other issues differing dramatically depending on the time, place, and background of the soldiers involved. Soldiers frequently denounced the influence of profiteering or of the annexationist aims of many military and civilian leaders, but they also frequently displayed an intense hostility towards non-combatants that fed into the dichotomising of the two fronts. See Ulrich 1997, pp. 78–105; Buschmann 1997, pp. 209–11; Brocks and Ziemann 1994; Lipp 2003, pp. 240–78.

whatever paper they could find that challenged official military publications.¹¹² The danger posed by unauthorised communication at the front was recognised by the military hierarchy, a widely circulated memo from the ministry of war in April 1917, for example, blaming pamphlets distributed at the front for the growing support for the Russian revolution.¹¹³ Activists within the army agitated in other ways as well. Erwin Piscator, for instance, who became the most prominent socialist theatre director of the Weimar period, developed his radical politics through the experience of war and his staging of plays at the front.¹¹⁴

Letters and other communications influenced state and military policy in another way, namely through the censorship process. Letters were read and in some cases systematically studied by military authorities in an attempt to discern the attitudes of soldiers and civilians. This mirrored the extensive collection of information by police and other authorities on the home front,¹¹⁵ and in both situations the findings were not encouraging for military and state hierarchies. The awareness of growing dissatisfaction influenced plans for demobilisation. Especially by 1916, when it was clear that this was not to be a short war, state and military actors began to consider the revolutionary potential of the subversive activities of women and of men returning from the front.¹¹⁶ By early 1918 the Prussian Minister of the Interior was stressing that the 'lack of food for the metropolitan proletariat . . . marks a latent threat to state order'.¹¹⁷

112 On the various official and unofficial newspapers, see Lipp 1997, pp. 27–61. The head of the army's newspaper publishing argued in early 1916 that '[p]olitics naturally doesn't belong in army newspapers' (p. 258). These newspapers were quite diverse, and offer more evidence of the absence of a homogeneous front identity that has been so often ascribed, especially by the radical right in the post-War years, as we shall see in the next section.

113 'Schreiben des preußischen Kriegsministeriums vom 13. April 1917 an obere Militär-, Polizei- und Verwaltungsbehörden über revolutionäre Agitation im Heer und in den Rüstungsbetrieben', in *Dokumente und Materialien* 1958, 11: 1, pp. 609–10.

114 Herzfelde 1996, pp. 20–21; Baumeister 2005, pp. 248–50. I will return to Piscator in the final chapter.

115 See *Dokumente aus geheimen Archiven* 1987 for a collection of police documents detailing this surveillance and the concerns that it produced.

116 On plans for demobilisation in relation to women, see Rouette 1993, pp. 22–41. It is important to note that most of this planning assumed a victorious outcome to the War, meaning that when the end did come, the dynamics of the immediate post-War weeks and months unfolded very differently than had been planned.

117 Quoted in Bieber 1981, 1, p. 442.

'Private' communication was thus very public and collective, and both military and state authorities sought to respond by managing opinion and information in a variety of ways. Censorship was the most obvious instance, but this management did not just involve restrictions. Philipp Witkop's famous compendia of soldiers' letters marked an important quasi-official attempt to make letters public in ways that sustained the war effort. First published as *War Letters of German Students* in 1916, his collection was expanded and republished as *War Letters of Fallen Students* after the War, selling in the hundreds of thousands. His books were endorsed by state authorities, and even under the post-War Republic the ministry of education assigned them to foster patriotism.¹¹⁸ While they contained some letters critical of aspects of the War, the collections produced largely nationalist narratives of self-sacrifice.¹¹⁹ Official military newspapers were another way in which the military sought to combat morale problems and to produce a sense of comradeship and duty at the front.¹²⁰ At the end of August 1914, in response to SPD support for the War, the ministry of war even lifted the longstanding ban on the dissemination of social-democratic materials in the army, provided that they did not subvert military discipline.¹²¹ The military and the state were thus increasingly involved in managing perceptions of war as part of the broader war effort.

Information management was perhaps most evident in relation to the new medium of film. The War transformed the German film industry and, for a brief moment at least, led to the deep integration of film production into the military-industrial complex. As Erich Ludendorff, the first quartermaster general of the army and one of the key architects of the War, argued in 1917, '[t]he war has demonstrated the paramount power of images and of film as means of enlightenment and influence... For the war to be concluded successfully, it is absolutely imperative that film be employed with the greatest force in all places where German influence is still possible'.¹²² Ludendorff was responding not only to the success of entertainment films produced by the commercial studios, but also to the newsreels put out by companies like Messter and Eiko that were shown in regular cinemas and in 'field theatres' for the troops.

118 This was the case for Witkop 1928.

119 On Witkop, see Hettling and Jeismann 1993; Winter 2006, pp. 103–17.

120 Nelson 2002.

121 'Schreiben des preußischen Kriegsministeriums vom 31. August 1914 an die Redaktion des "Vorwärts" über die Aufhebung des Verbots, sozialdemokratische Schriften in der Armee zu verbreiten', in *Dokumente und Materialien* 1958, 11: 1, p. 28.

122 Quoted in Jelavich 1999, p. 42.

The impact of the *Messter Week* and other newsreels were limited, however, by military censorship enacted on operational and ideological grounds.¹²³ This censorship meant that the newsreels often lacked any concrete content, and viewers treated them with scepticism. This was especially the case with soldiers, as a description of their viewing of films at the front from 1916 suggests: '[t]he insincerity of these patchwork war films provokes universal hilarity. The whole place fairly shakes with laughter. What those at home gaze at in wonder is derided mercilessly here'.¹²⁴

This limited success of their film efforts did not prevent the state and the military from becoming more directly involved in the industry. After 1916 when, as indicated earlier, the lack of military victories and growing dissent led to an increasing focus on sustaining mobilisation, interest in film as a medium for propaganda and distraction increased dramatically as part of a broader modernisation of communication strategies undertaken by the state and the military.¹²⁵ The first major step was the formation of the *Deutschen Lichtbild Gesellschaft* (DLG, later *Deulig-Film*) in November 1916. This was a private commercial concern driven by the Krupp director Alfred Hugenberg, a prominent industrialist, Pan-German activist, and, in the later Weimar years, a major radical right media mogul. While profit-driven, the DLG was committed to patriotic filmmaking directed in part at gaining support for the German war effort in neutral countries, but it tended to reflect the rather narrow interests of heavy industrialists most committed to a war of annexation.¹²⁶

Spurred on by the DLG's work as well as an increasing awareness of the extensive use of film in enemy countries, Ludendorff and the military began to develop their own propaganda machinery. Reflecting the increasing integration of military, state, and society characteristic of 'total war', the War Ministry established a Film and Photography Office (*Bild- und Filmamt*, or BuFa) on 30 January 1917 to oversee these efforts.¹²⁷ As Wilhelm Meyer argued a few months later in an article entitled 'The Mobilisation of Images':

¹²³ Jung and Mühl-Benninghaus 2005, pp. 395–96 thus call it the 'invisible war'.

¹²⁴ Quoted in Mühl-Benninghaus 1996, pp. 180–81. See also Stiasny 2009, pp. 28–36. We might question the soldier's notion of the passively accepting audiences of the home front; they would likely have been equally sceptical. The view put forward here also builds on gendered notions of the audience in which women were seen as 'vulnerable' to persuasion, a perspective that, as we shall see in the fifth chapter, underlay ideas of film more broadly.

¹²⁵ Schmidt 2006, pp. 113–82.

¹²⁶ Schmidt 2006, pp. 157–60; Mühl-Benninghaus 2004, pp. 173–95; Kreimeier 1996, pp. 18–19.

¹²⁷ Mühl-Benninghaus 2004, pp. 196–214; Stiasny 2009, pp. 30–33; Jung and Mühl-Benninghaus 2005, p. 409.

People in Germany have long believed that the war could only be decided with the strength of the sword and the purity of the object. Only very gradually came the realisation that in this life and death struggle all weapons, including the spiritual and moral, needed to be used. Only after two years of war did the first official research begin to bring the most important of these weapons, photography and film, into the ambit of military direction.¹²⁸

Here again we find the stress on culture as a means for national moral and spiritual regeneration, although now new media were the vehicle.

Bufo's propaganda films met with limited success amongst the increasingly disillusioned population and, by late 1917, the next key step was taken in the militarisation of the film industry. Again driven by Ludendorff, in late 1917 the *Universum Film AG*, or Ufa, was formed. This remained by far the most prominent German film company throughout the Weimar period. It was initially formed with the state as the controlling shareholder, an investment kept secret and divested after the War. The intent was not simply to create another propaganda organ in the mould of Bufo, but to develop an integrated film company. Ufa had access to significant capital, enabling it to buy up scores of other major production and distribution companies, including Messter, with the result being a massive, vertically and horizontally integrated concern.¹²⁹ Whilst its entertainment films provided distractions from the hardships of war, Ufa was also tasked with the production of what were called 'enlightenment films' like *Let there be Light!*, which I will discuss shortly. At the heart of these pedagogical efforts was Ufa's 'culture film department', established at the urging of the conservative film reform movement, a development that, as I will discuss at greater length in the fifth chapter, was to have a major impact on the development of the Weimar film industry, and especially on the dissemination of discourses of eugenics and social hygiene.¹³⁰

These projects for information management demonstrate the extent to which the military and state bodies were now aware of the importance of mass mobilisation in sustaining fading state legitimacy, as well as their growing fears of the price of failure in this regard. The Russian revolutions of February and October 1917 stoked these fears, both within older élites and in the reformist SPD. While the Party continued to adhere to the terms of the *Burgfrieden*, it was clear that they no longer spoke for large sections of the working class.

128 Quoted in Stiasny 2009, p. 31.

129 On the history of the company, see Kreimeier 1996.

130 Jung 2005; Mühl-Benninghaus 2004, pp. 234–38.

Oppositional social democrats and trade unionists had already argued in 1915 that the *Burgfrieden* marked 'the cross on the grave of the class struggle', calling for a return to militant struggle.¹³¹

The potential threat of revolution was met not only by attempts to shore up the old order, but also by vague state promises beginning in late 1916 for a 'new orientation' in politics and society following the War. These promises gestured towards a more democratic order, but they also sought to contain class-based mobilisations through the reassertion of a gendered division of labour. This approach built on the conflicts over women's wage labour noted above, but these conflicts were framed strongly through the logic of hygiene and degeneration. Thus, broader structural tensions were addressed through an economic and social management in which bodies, and especially women's bodies, played a central role. This approach, as we shall see, was reflected in the broader culture of the period, but was immediately evident in the comments on women's wage labour made in October 1916 by the State Secretary of the Interior Helffrich:

The issue here is ... not to free up jobs for the returning men, but also to recreate a balance in the division of labor for men and women, for adults and adolescents, which is beneficial for the people's health [*Volks-gesundheit*]. I repeat that this will not occur without severity; women, who have gotten used to the high wages and independent work, will not easily and voluntarily find their way back into the old circumstances.¹³²

While, as we have seen, Helffrich's sentiments were in fact shared by much of the left, the trade union movement, and bourgeois-feminist organisations, his comments both make clear that working women themselves in no way shared this broader consensus, and foreground the extent to which these social issues were conceived of in terms of 'health'. The normative bodily dimensions of 'health' was underlined by one of his undersecretaries who expanded on Helffrich's comments a few days later: '[w]hen one looks at women these days, how they are working in all of these difficult positions, the women in armaments factories, on the coachbox, in street-cleaning, one has to look closely in order to tell if it is a woman or a man before them. Through this work of women in male occupations the entire female organism and orientation in

131 'Erklärung oppositioneller Sozialdemokraten und Gewerkschafter an den Vorstand und die Reichstagsfraktion der SPD gegen die Fortsetzung der Burgfriedenspolitik, 9. Juni 1915' in *Dokumente und Materialien* 1958, II: 1, p. 169.

132 Quoted in Daniel 1997, pp. 100–1.

drawn in new directions, and it ultimately expresses itself externally as well'. Given these changes, he continued, it would be difficult to compel women to leave their new work positions, '[b]ut in the interests of the people's welfare [*Volkswohl*] and simultaneously the interests of male workers, we must strive for this'.¹³³

What is especially notable in these comments is the extent to which the gendered division of labour was conceptualised through the language of social hygiene and degeneration. The bodily gender dissonance of masculine women was a common trope in writings on degeneration, cited as one of the most dangerous products of modern social transformations. The threat of women's wage labour to the patriarchal economic order was expressed here in terms of a transgression of naturalised bodily norms evident also in the threat of a feminisation of men. Thus, the National-Liberal paper *Magdeburgische Zeitung* argued in July 1917 that the War was a test of masculinity. 'The people will keep its nerve, only let us take it like a nation of men, not like a nation of neurasthenics!'¹³⁴

These arguments tapped into long-standing fears over the impact of degeneration. The crisis of gender and sexuality that these comments expressed were bound up with anxieties over declining birth rates and national health exacerbated by the violence of war. These anxieties, as I have discussed, entailed an intense interest in and desire to regulate and control women's reproductive and sexual practices. Before the War questions of prostitution and STIs had already been prominent in this respect, and these concerns were magnified by the War. Fears over social instability were tied directly to perceptions of unruly femininity. Sex work and STIs were both read as signs of an uncontrolled female sexuality, and thus as threats to a healthy *Volkskörper*.

Sex work was especially significant in this regard, and is a theme that we will encounter in various contexts throughout the book, in particular in allegories linking prostitution to modernity itself. Sex work had been regulated in Germany prior to the War. Systems of regulation were based on the premise that prostitution was both necessary given men's innate sexual drives, and a potential threat to social order. Regulation was primarily done through local authorities. Sex work was not conceptualised as a form of labour, but rather in terms of disease and morality, and hence bound tightly to questions of national and racial health. In practice this meant that 'prostitutes' were subject to police control, in particular that of the 'morals police', or vice squad (*Sittenpolizei*). Who was considered a 'prostitute' was rather slippery, however.

133 Quoted in Rouette 1993, pp. 27–28.

134 Quoted in Schumann 2009, p. xxxiv.

The police were given the power to stop women suspected of engaging in sex work and, under a reverse onus, if they could not prove otherwise, women were then forced to register with the police. Registration enabled subsequent police interventions into women's lives, imposing restrictions on movement and forcing them to undergo periodic testing for STIs.¹³⁵ Because any woman could potentially be registered as a prostitute, this regulation needs to be seen as part of broader systems of control over women's sexuality and occupation of public space. In 1910 in Baden, for example, a complaint was registered 'that a respectable woman cannot walk along the streets any more at all in the evening or at night, without being molested . . . first by men . . . but also . . . by police officers'.¹³⁶ The idea of 'respectable' was subject to police interpretation, though, meaning that working-class and poorer women were overwhelmingly those subjected to police controls.

Systems of regulation varied, but the most common form was called *Kasernierung* ('barracking'), where sex work was restricted to specific and very limited parts of the city, thus imposing severe spatial controls over women. In some cities municipal governments and the police licensed brothels, a practice that Lida Gustava Heymann had targeted in 1900 in trying to bring procuring charges against the Hamburg Senate.¹³⁷ In addition to forced medical testing, those registered as prostitutes were stripped of other basic civil rights. They could not live near churches or schools, and were often barred from specific public squares, parks, theatres, and other spaces. In Munich it was illegal for prostitutes to ride bicycles, while in Leipzig and Bremen they were prohibited from travelling in open carriages.¹³⁸ Laws against procuring also potentially criminalised the personal relationships of sex workers. This extensive regulatory web thus produced the 'prostitute' as a legal category of person stripped of many basic rights. While this affected registered workers directly, it also profoundly shaped the lives of other sex workers by forcing them to operate clandestinely in the shadow of these forms of social control.¹³⁹

135 For discussions of the regulation of sex work, see Abrams 1988; Evans 1998, pp. 181–201; Reagin 1995, pp. 147–72; Stubbs 2001, pp. 19–21. Ostwald 1926, pp. 634–46 offers a contemporary history of sex work in Berlin. Hirschfeld and Gaspar 1990, originally published in 1929, remains an exceptionally valuable resource on the sexual history of the war.

136 Quoted in Evans 1998, p. 205.

137 Stubbs 2001, p. 38.

138 Roos 2001, pp. 45–48.

139 Estimates of numbers are very difficult to ascertain, but the number of women registered as prostitutes was in most places far fewer than the number of women arrested for prostitution, suggesting that the system of regulation only captured a fraction of the overall

As the left frequently noted, policing and regulation impacted much more strongly on working-class women, dovetailing with myriad other forms of regulation of working-class life. In August Bebel's classic account from 1879, marriage and prostitution were seen as interconnected forms of capitalist gender relations, the former securing property relations and class reproduction, the second a form of sexuality whose commodity character meant that it would not threaten inheritance and property relations.¹⁴⁰ At the same time, as was evident in panics over 'white slavery', the alleged trafficking of women, these concerns were read onto the national body, with the promiscuous movement of women's sexualised bodies over borders threatening national and racial health.

The socialist-feminist Lily Braun was amongst the minority of activists who rejected Christian moral arguments and saw sex work in part as a form of labour. She argued in the early 1900s that sex workers should be unionised and women should have control over their own sexuality.¹⁴¹ At the same time, she endorsed many of the moral regulationist assumptions in depicting prostitution as 'that worst curse of degenerate humanity', linking it directly to the spread of venereal disease in men. Such a man 'can ruin his wife and children and make his progeny into criminals or lunatics. Yet as soon as property advantages are at stake, the ruling society closes its eyes to these consequences and recruits ever more legions of hapless girls and women into this army which ravages more countries and destroys more nations than war, starvation, and epidemics'.¹⁴² Feminist arguments were thus not free of hygienic and eugenic concerns, but many stressed the dangerous effect of a 'double morality' that judged women's and men's sexuality by very different standards, constituting women's bodies as the locus of state and extra-state intervention.

Challenges to the repressive nature of state regulation and especially those that conceived of prostitution as a form of labour were rare, however, a point to which I will return in the fourth chapter. More prominent were the ideologically heterogeneous abolitionist movements that emerged in the early twentieth century. These called for the abolition of prostitution as a whole, although how this would be done and the reasons why varied dramatically. For the stridently

industry. This was one of the grounds on which abolitionists argued against regulation, suggesting that any system of regulation that missed most of its targets was rather counter-productive and ineffective in preventing the spread of venereal disease.

140 Bebel 1971, pp. 91–104.

141 'The Dethroning of Love' in Braun 1987, pp. 117–23.

142 'Women and Politics' in Braun 1987, pp. 81–82.

anti-feminist male Christian morality movement, for example, regulation simply allowed immorality to flourish; what was needed was a stronger repression and criminalisation of sex work and workers.¹⁴³ Abolitionist currents within the bourgeois women's movement took a different tack, and proved extremely influential. These were most often German branches of the International Abolitionist Federation, beginning with Heymann's group in Hamburg in 1898, but their approaches varied. In Hanover, for instance, activists worked closely with conservative male groups and local politicians, meaning that they did not denounce the role of male clients as strongly as did others, made few contacts with working-class organisations, and rarely identified with prostitutes, a strategic positioning used by other feminist activists.¹⁴⁴ Radical activists like Heymann or Stöcker argued against these more conservative tendencies, foregrounding the role of regulation in sustaining the 'double morality' of patriarchal society and its attendant naturalisation of sexual difference. For Stöcker and the *Bund für Mutterschutz* in particular, as mentioned earlier, this was part of a broader argument for women's sexual liberation in the context of a system of gender relations in which marriage and prostitution were the only legally recognised forms of heterosexual relations, each representing an impoverished form of human relations built on gender inequality.¹⁴⁵ These radicals also stressed the social and economic roots of prostitution, enabling them to forge alliances with socialist activists. Radicals thus rejected the criminalisation of prostitutes, advocating instead for the transformation of the gendered economic and social bases of prostitution.

The War sharpened many of the debates around sex work and the connections with population politics. Regulation became more entrenched in many respects, especially in areas under military jurisdiction where authorities set up brothels for soldiers. As with so many areas of military life, there were separate brothels for officers and enlisted men (the former marked by blue lights, the latter red), with different prices and a different organisation of work.¹⁴⁶ Official front newspapers tended to reinforce the 'double morality', portraying fidelity as the norm for German women, but not for the 'foreign' women who made up many of the workers, or for male soldiers. The primary concern of military

143 Dickinson 2003. He stresses that the men's morality movement rejected the 'double morality' argument, contending that men too must maintain a chaste lifestyle, and that 'the rhetoric of the men's morality movement regarding regulated prostitution... revealed anything but an interest in protecting the sexual privileges of men' (p. 70).

144 Reagin 1995, pp. 159–66.

145 Stöcker 1986, pp. 113–16.

146 Hirschfeld 1990, pp. 231–54.

and state authorities was in preventing the spread of STIs,¹⁴⁷ with the bulk of regulations addressing this issue. Thus, both clients and workers were directed to wash using antiseptics, to use condoms, and to take other preventative measures, but it was the sex workers alone who were configured as the 'source' of infection, and thus it was they themselves rather than their behaviour that was regulated. This included mandatory police registration and subjection to various forms of punishment, including imprisonment, for violations.¹⁴⁸

The abolitionist BdF challenged this regulationist approach, urging the military 'in the interest of national health [*Volksgesundheit*] ... to forbid soldiers' extra-marital sexual relations during wartime'.¹⁴⁹ But by 1915 military and medical authorities were discovering that the majority of soldiers with an STI had been infected on the home front, leading them instead to extend military regulation of sex work to the home front, a development that, as Lisa Todd shows, reinforced the gendered dichotomies between the two fronts, with the home front configured as a source of danger.¹⁵⁰ This enabled a broader regulation of women's sexual relations, including in relation to women's potential and actual sexual relations with POWs.¹⁵¹ Such women performed a double violation, undermining the gendered moral order and also betraying the nation.

Women's unconstrained sexuality was thus configured as a profound threat to the *Volkskörper*. For Marie Eggers-Smidt, an activist in the German Society to Combat Venereal Disease (*Deutsche Gesellschaft zur Bekämpfung der Geschlechtskrankheiten*, or DGBG), this presented a quasi-military threat. Speaking of the *Animierkneipe*, or 'hostess bars', in which sex work was feared to be taking place, she said in 1915: '[w]e are fighting not only the outer enemies who surround us on every side, but also the inner enemy of the hostess bar'.¹⁵² As an 'inner enemy', prostitutes thus joined spies, pacifists, anti-war leftists, and 'foreign' elements of various kinds as threats not only to the prosecution of the War, but to the very existence of the nation. As we shall see, this rhetoric coalesced after the War in the myth that the German army was stabbed in the back by treasonous elements on the home front.

147 Nelson 2002, pp. 79–80. The papers were quite open about male infidelity but, somewhat surprisingly, Nelson says that they only occasionally warned soldiers about the dangers of STIs.

148 Todd 2005, pp. 63–97.

149 Quoted in Kundrus 1995, p. 215.

150 Todd 2005, pp. 100–35.

151 Todd 2005, pp. 136–80; Kundrus 1995, pp. 212–15.

152 Quoted in Todd 2005, p. 125.

During the War, women's sexuality thus came to be entwined ever more deeply with ideas of degeneration and social hygiene. The Hanover Women's Service, the BdF organisation to promote women's service in the War effort, for instance, decried the 'brazenly immoral [style] of women's clothing which is completely un-German, which even in this time [war] can be seen on the street, and which is tragic proof of the superficiality and thoughtlessness of those women who wear it . . . It is a sign of the worst type of degeneration'.¹⁵³ This comment highlights the extent to which women's public deportment was open to scrutiny and linked to illegitimate sexual activity. Extra-marital sexual activity was, for the Hanover Women's Service, especially threatening: '[s]uch women sin against the Fatherland, and a people that tolerates such immorality must begin to die'.¹⁵⁴ This existential threat echoed the broader conceptions of degeneration traced in the introduction to the book. The fears over gender transgressions was also evident in the many stories that emerged of soldiers discovered to be women;¹⁵⁵ as we shall see in the next section, the radical right responded especially violently to such transgressions.

The regulation of women's sexuality was increasingly framed through a medicalising perspective that linked sexuality with disease.¹⁵⁶ The medical approach was at the heart of state and extra-state educational campaigns to promote hygienic practices, and it is here that we can begin to see the extent to which these forms of regulation dovetail with the broader gendered politics of the war years, and with the state's attempts to shore up its legitimacy through moral regulation. The DGBG was especially prominent in supporting state efforts in this regard. It had been formed by a group of dermatologists and venereologists in 1902, maintaining ties with a number of other groups, including Anna Papritz and other centrist-abolitionist leaders in the BdF.¹⁵⁷ The DGBG was by no means simply a conservative organisation; its secretary, Alfred Blaschko, even had connections with socialist doctors and other activists. Many DGBG members also stressed the social contexts of STIs,

153 Quoted in Reagin 1995, p. 197.

154 Quoted in Reagin 1995, p. 199.

155 'Frauen als Soldaten im Weltkrieg' 1983. The anonymous author of this article, published in a prominent radical sexological journal in 1915, used this phenomenon to explore transvestism, arguing that it threw into question the nature of and restrictions on women's service. While mainstream newspaper stories reinforced readers' fears of gender transgression, this Weimar-era response thus sought to de-pathologise dissident gender practices.

156 As we shall see in the fourth chapter, this shaped not only debates over sex work in the Weimar period, but also broader understandings of the politics of the body.

157 Weindling 1989, pp. 181–82.

prostitution, alcoholism, and other issues with which they dealt. By the time of the War, it had become the most influential non-governmental organisation in the field of STIs. As with so many other organisations, the onset of war led them to join with state and the military, undertaking many projects including educational work with Bufa, the War Ministry's film and photography arm. Thus, DGBG members helped produce a slide-show series on STIs, 100 copies of which were distributed for screening to soldiers at the front.¹⁵⁸ Perhaps their most notable success was in their work with the director Richard Oswald on his anti-STI film *Let there be Light!* (*Es werde Licht!*) in 1917.¹⁵⁹ In these examples we can see the extent to which broader efforts at information management were elaborated through social hygienic concerns.

As the preceding discussion has shown, the war effort was profoundly shaped by gendered social relations. This was evident especially in the dichotomisation of the home and fighting fronts, which provided not only an influential way of conceptualising the dynamics of war, but also shaped the contestations over the legitimacy of the war effort, and of the state and capital. These gendered dynamics were complex, with gendered norms serving on the one hand as a legitimisation of women's protests, and on the other as a way of reinscribing gendered hierarchies in which men worked and women's access to public space was severely limited. This involved a dramatic extension of state intervention into reproductive practices ranging from the distribution of food to the regulation of sexuality. Ultimately, though, the state and the military proved unable to overcome their own growing delegitimation. At the same time, the gendered dynamics that developed in this period had profound implications not only for the unfolding of the War itself, but also for the period that followed. Thus, in the face of growing inequality, profiteering, and the failure of the planned wartime economy, the legitimacy of capitalism itself was shaken, but was shaken in profoundly gendered ways. In later chapters I will return to the themes outlined above and explore the ways in which they shaped the dynamics of the Weimar period, but here I will turn back to consider more closely the trajectory of the radical challenges to the state, military, and capital.

In the historiography of the War, the challenge to capital is generally associated with growing industrial militancy that manifested itself in strike action that grew throughout the War, a perspective that foregrounds the role of male

¹⁵⁸ Blaschko 1919, p. 264.

¹⁵⁹ Smith 2010. As I will discuss in the fifth chapter, Oswald was one of the most prominent producers of educational films in the Weimar period, and *Let there be Light!* was one of his most significant contributions to that film movement.

workers. But, as Belinda Davis argues, women's protests laid the ground for the waves of strikes that by 1917 had begun to take on mass dimensions.¹⁶⁰ Initial strikes during the War were directly linked with the kinds of hardships against which women were protesting. The first strikes had come in response to cuts, subsequently rescinded, to bread rations in April 1915. They gathered real momentum with wildcat strikes in late 1916 and early 1917, culminating in 300,000 munitions workers downing tools in April 1917.¹⁶¹ Women made up around half of the participants, with the strikers arguing for the alleviation of hunger and the ending of the War¹⁶² as well as beginning to articulate demands for changes to labour conditions, full men's and women's suffrage, and challenges to the imperial state.¹⁶³ The Spartacus group went furthest in this respect, demanding the freeing of political prisoners, establishment of universal civil rights, and the end to military control over labour, all of which would serve as precursors to worker self-government.¹⁶⁴ The Spartacists remained relatively detached from shop-floor activism, however, with revolutionary shop stewards such as Richard Müller pushing the radical agenda at that level.¹⁶⁵ As with women's street protests, the state did respond by attempting to address some of the concerns around hunger, but also with a greater degree of repression.

The initial strikes ended relatively quickly, and gained few concessions, but they were repeated with as many as two million participating nationwide in January 1918; the Prussian minister of the interior called them the 'first political mass strike in Germany'.¹⁶⁶ The SPD hierarchy reluctantly began to participate, although primarily in order to slow the radicalisation of the workers.¹⁶⁷ By this time women's consumption-based protests had declined markedly, but, Davis argues, this was not because they had been superseded by strike action. Rather, the state's inability to offer a substantive response to the protests (the provision of extra rations, for example) and the perception of the state itself as a profiteer produced the complete delegitimisation of the state in the eyes of

160 Davis 2000, pp. 200–4.

161 Schneider 2005, pp. 125–26; Ullrich 1999; Bieber 1981, 1, pp. 441–86.

162 See Carsten 1982, pp. 124–42 on the anti-war aspects of the strikes.

163 Canning 2006, pp. 224–25; Bieber 1981, 1, pp. 442–43.

164 'Der Kampf dauert fort!' [1917], in *Dokumente und Materialien* 1958, II: 1, pp. 615–17.

165 Müller himself produced a number of valuable histories of these developments (see especially Müller 1924). See also Bailey 1980, pp. 159–61; Ullrich 1999, p. 276.

166 Quoted in Bieber 1981, 1, pp. 443–44. Government estimates put the number at between half a million and a million workers, while the USPD gave the estimate of two million (p. 442).

167 Ullrich 1999, p. 277.

the protestors; appeals to the state were no longer seen as useful.¹⁶⁸ This was increasingly the case in other sectors of society as well, including within the army itself. Based in part on his reading of soldiers' correspondence, Benjamin Ziemann concludes that by mid-1918 'the collapse of the state's legitimacy had reached a level in the armed forces similar to that in civilian society', although challenges to military authority remained relatively piecemeal and less directly political than with the strikes.¹⁶⁹

By the last years of war, the rhetoric of the *Burgfrieden* was becoming rather threadbare, and the right increasingly began to attack 'internal enemies' including socialists, Jews, Poles, and other perceived threats to unity; it was at this time that fears concerning prostitution, STIs, and women's uncontrolled sexuality also gained particular resonance.¹⁷⁰ However, as Anne Lipp argues, the huge concern displayed in field newspapers and reports on soldiers' attitudes in the aftermath of the January 1918 strikes suggests that the attempt to play on the dichotomy between the two fronts did not resonate with many soldiers. Officials increasingly scrutinised both SPD writings and soldiers' attitudes, but, as one put it, drawing on ideas of crowd psychology, the hopeful idea that peace would come once the strikes had deprived the army of munitions spread like a 'mass suggestion' among the soldiers.¹⁷¹ 'A rapid end to the War without annexations was among the key demands of the strikers. For soldiers at the front, this was the point where their interests met those of the munitions workers in Germany'.¹⁷²

The political import of the strikes was interesting when seen in light of women's protests. Davis argues that the strikes were inspired by women's protests, but in fact strikes remained reformist in character, seeking concessions from the state and employers. Women's protests, on the other hand, embodied a more radical impulse: 'if the popular demands of the April and January strikes helped pave the way for the October reforms, pushing for change within the system, in many ways, the ongoing mass consumer-based activity was key to the November revolution above all through its resolution by 1918 that the

168 Davis 2000, pp. 216–18.

169 Ziemann 2007, p. 109. Support amongst soldiers for the wave of strikes in early 1918, for example, was very limited, although Ziemann does argue that soldiers frequently blamed big business and other élites for the War, and had significant sympathy for the broader principle of a non-annexationist peace pushed by the left (pp. 145–52). See also Ullrich 1999, pp. 280–82.

170 Lipp 2003, pp. 232–38.

171 Quoted in Lipp 2003, pp. 262–63.

172 Lipp 2003, p. 263.

existing regime was unreformable'.¹⁷³ This had much to do with the SPD, which remained the largest working-class party, acting as a brake on demands even while many workers themselves had grown to reject the Party's support for the War. In part because of their lack of organisational supports, the demands of protesting women proved more radical than those of the SPD. Of course it was not only the left's timidity that limited the scope of demands; a variety of repressive measures, including the imprisonment of leaders, the firing of radical workers, the mobilisation of various reactionary groups, and outright violence were brought to bear against working-class action.

The *völkisch* German *Vaterlandspartei* (DVLP) was an early exponent of these growing reactionary values. The Party formed in 1917 in response to a peace resolution passed by parliament. While the Party claimed neutrality in domestic politics and an openness to all, it was supported by heavy industrial interests, promoted annexationist war aims, and agitated forcefully against any suffrage reform and changes in labour relations.¹⁷⁴ Significantly, a third of the initial membership was women, a striking number given that women had only been permitted to participate in Party politics for five years; indeed, over the course of the Weimar period right-wing parties proved at least as adept at mobilising women as did those on the left.¹⁷⁵ The DVLP was involved in the military's campaign beginning in March 1917 to inculcate nationalist values through the deployment of 'enlightenment officers' whose job was to co-ordinate 'patriotic instruction' (*Vaterländischer Unterricht*) among the troops; this often included the dissemination of materials supplied free or at cost by the DVLP.¹⁷⁶ Such nationalist rhetoric had limited resonance outside

173 Davis 2000, p. 219.

174 Bieber 1981, 2, pp. 529–32. Bieber stresses that industrialists were acutely aware that voting reform would inevitably feed into growing demands for democratisation of labour relations (p. 531); this was borne out in the post-War period when the council movement in particular sought to develop workplace democracy. For a history of the DVLP, see Hagenlücke 1997, who stresses the roots of the Party in the pre-war associational politics of the German right that, as I will discuss later, served as an incubator for the emergence of the post-War radical right.

175 Heinsohn 2000, pp. 223–24. As Heinsohn points out, this compares favourably with the SPD's level of twenty percent women members, although the SPD was a much larger party, so in absolute numbers attracted more women. The formation of the DVLP demonstrates the broader shift away from the élite-focused politics on the right and towards the incorporation of a wider range of members and actors. The Party was strongly supported by sections of German industry that benefitted from the war.

176 Schmidt 2006, pp. 170–73.

a bourgeois audience,¹⁷⁷ but provided the organisational basis for countering reformist and revolutionary movements and linking pre-War groups like the Pan-German League with the radical right movements that gained prominence in the post-War period; these latter groups will be explored in the following section.

The 1917 Bufa film *Indefensible* [*Unsühnbar*], released in the summer following the April strikes, provides a powerful example of how the state sought to combat the impact of the strikes and sustain the legitimacy of the war effort by drawing on themes of national unity promoted by the DVLP and other similar groups. The film traces the stories of two brothers, the elder a soldier, the younger working in a munitions factory that engages in strike action. The elder brother is killed when, in fighting off an enemy attack, he runs out of ammunition. The causal link between strikes and military defeat is thus central to the film, but what is especially interesting is how this is framed. Strike action is fomented by a stranger who is later arrested as a foreign agent, the film playing into widespread associations of left-wing ideas with foreign, often Jewish, elements, as well as tapping into fears of spies. Alcohol also plays a role in driving the workers on, their lack of control depicted as a result of degenerative processes that, in the case of the younger son, manifests itself in the form of nervous fits. The film ends with the younger son seeking to atone for his actions by volunteering for the army.¹⁷⁸

Indefensible thus counterposes a narrative of masculine heroism to the nervous disorders that, according to theories of degeneration, characterised modern life. In shaping the narrative around filial conflict rather than the previously more common father-son relationship, the film even acknowledges the extent to which patriarchal authority had been undermined over the course of the War. The film illustrates Domansky's claim that the war saw a dichotomisation of the masculine military values of the fighting front with the feminised values associated with socialist politics, nervous disorders, and foreign elements. She contends that in the context of the delegitimisation of the state, traditional bourgeois ideas of the *Volk* that relied heavily on the patriarchal

177 Ziemann 2007, for example, argues that rhetoric of the fatherland did little to motivate soldiers, especially those from rural areas, and that this rhetorical influence decreased the longer the war went on. The creation of the Fatherland Party in particular, he argues, exacerbated soldiers' suspicions, especially as officers made up a significant segment of those who joined. As one farmer's son put it in April 1918, '[t]he biggest traitors of the Fatherland are the members of the Fatherland Party. The leaders of these rascals belong in prison' (p. 141). See also Lipp 2003, p. 261.

178 See Stiasny 2009, pp. 75–78 for a detailed description of the film.

structures of the imperial state were giving way, thereby enabling new ways of understanding the *Volksgemeinschaft*, the national community.¹⁷⁹ This was very much in evidence in the brotherly conflict and resolution of *Indefensible*.

Domansky's argument is important to highlight once again, and can serve to bring together some of the strands of my argument. It is most commonly argued that the end of the War was marked by a nostalgia for an older patriarchal order. As Susanne Rouette puts it, for most Germans 'the restoration of a "normality" based largely on prewar conditions aimed to a great extent at a restoration of the gender order, which, in the view of many contemporaries, had fallen into a disturbing "disarray" during the war. Central areas of state social and welfare policy in the post-War period were directed, not merely implicitly but in many cases explicitly, at a reconstruction of the gender relations and hierarchies of the prewar period'.¹⁸⁰ She is certainly correct in highlighting the assertion of male authority, but Domansky suggests that there was a more fundamental restructuring underway that cannot be read simply in terms of a return to an earlier order. Rather, the War gave rise to 'a fundamentally new relationship between military destruction, industrial production, and the organization of the social and biological reproduction of society'.¹⁸¹ Tellingly, it was the mobilisations of poorer women that we have looked at here that drew especially strongly on ideas of the patriarchal family and state in 'the formation of a discursive counterstrategy against the militarization of society and of an opposition movement against the War that would, finally, end the war'.¹⁸² On the radical right, by contrast, we find not a nostalgia for an old patriarchal order, but a desire to reconfigure society along the lines of the two fronts. Thus, Domansky argues, 'Weimar society . . . reconstituted itself not simply as a society at peace but as a militarized society at peace . . . [providing] the political right in Weimar with the opportunity to capitalize on a discursive strategy that could successfully compete with liberal and socialist strategies'.¹⁸³

In 1915 Käthe Duncker had already recognised that the left had missed a powerful opportunity to produce new forms of politics and to enable new mobilisations in these changing contexts. Writing about the integration of left women into social welfare initiatives during the War, she argued that the left could have mobilised through these gendered practices had they not succumbed to the call of war in August 1914:

179 Domansky 1996, pp. 427–34.

180 Rouette 1997, p. 49.

181 Domansky 1996, p. 427.

182 Domansky 1996, p. 437.

183 Domansky 1996, p. 462.

To be sure, a situation could have been possible in which we would have advocated for the official participation of female party comrades in war relief [*Kriegsfürsorge*]. Had the parliamentary caucus expressed its principled opposition to the genocide from the beginning through the rejection of war credits, the world would have seen that in our care work we were never wounding, but that we were instead always prepared to heal wounds. Then, with our socialist enlightenment taken care of through our caucus's parliamentary action, we could have followed unconditionally our broad sense of social compassion. We could also thereby have carried out the work of enlightenment in opposition to those who would have construed our rejection of war credits as enmity towards the soldiers and soldiers' families. But, it happened differently!¹⁸⁴

Duncker's argument echoes the dismay of many left-radicals about the SPD's abdication of their internationalist principles, but especially significant is the fact that she develops this perspective through the possibilities of a specifically feminised activism. Duncker's challenge is directed precisely at the rhetoric of the two fronts, invoking a socialist ethic of care that challenged bourgeois dichotomies of spiritual motherhood and masculinist militarism, but in the process also highlighting the lack of attention by the left to this gendered politics. If the left missed the opportunity presented by the reconfiguration of gendered relations during and after the War, however, a point to which I will return in the next chapter, the radical right did not.

2.4 Masculinity, War, and the Cultural Politics of the Weimar Radical Right

The end of the War presented the radical right with a dismaying spectacle. Not only was the War lost, but the hated left seemed in the ascendancy. The SPD quickly became the party of government, pushing for the establishment of a parliamentary republic to replace the imperial order, and various radical movements further to the left threatened even greater social change. The 'magic formula' that the radical-right author Ernst Jünger had experienced in the unity of August 1914 was shattered. Worse, the experience of war itself, the life of the front, was no more. The masculine unity promised by war was disintegrating under a nauseating onslaught of threatening forces. That this unity had never truly existed was of little consequence. Indeed, as we shall see, for

¹⁸⁴ Duncker 1915, p. 28.

radical right writers like Jünger, Oswald Spengler, or Arthur Moeller van den Bruck, it was the struggle itself that was the most important value. In the aftermath of war, all this was under grave threat.

These radical right fears were built on the emergent politics and mythology of the two fronts. This mythological system certainly had material roots. There is no denying that the impact of scarcity, deprivation, and social upheaval on the home front produced a certain shared experience, while for soldiers, as Scott Stephenson argues, there was also a powerful commonality produced by the experience of danger and death shared in close proximity.¹⁸⁵ Frontline soldiers frequently developed a strong sense of alienation from those who did not share their experiences, with a special disdain for those serving in the *Etappe*, or rear echelons of the front, and especially for officers who never experienced trench warfare directly.¹⁸⁶ To speak of the myths of the two fronts is thus not to deny these material realities and the ways in which they produced particular forms of consciousness. Yet these seemingly shared experiences gave rise to a wide range of responses. For some, it led to a rejection of war, while others celebrated its violence. These different responses had much to do with social and political background, especially class. As we saw with the experience of August 1914, the idea of 'unity' needs to be carefully interrogated.

As Domansky suggests, the delegitimation of state authority and the militarisation of society opened up space for new forms of political mobilisation that the radical right moved to fill. The radical right played a central counter-revolutionary role, with the suppression of the left during the post-War revolutions providing the context within which the radical right could translate their wartime experience, in particular that of the trenches, into peacetime. The revolutionary upsurges of 1918–19 were contained through a variety of mechanisms, but it was the right-wing paramilitaries, the *Freikorps*, that were the cutting edge of this often-violent process. The *Freikorps* were somewhat heterogeneous in their social composition, but were driven by NCOs and frontline reserve officers violently opposed to the new Republic.¹⁸⁷ They

185 Stephenson 2009, pp. 50–60.

186 Stephenson 2009, pp. 35–39. The widespread nature of this disdain and its political heterogeneity was evident after the War. Dirk Schumann describes how in clashes in 1921 in Eilenburg and Eisleben between members of the *Stahlhelm*, the right-wing Combat League, and the KPD's Proletarian Hundreds, the latter would taunt the *Stahlhelm* members not only for their support of authoritarian politics, but also for being *Etapenschweine* ('rear echelon pigs'), and hence not 'true' soldiers (2009, p. 121).

187 Diehl 1977; Koch 2002.

attracted a range of participants including unemployed white-collar workers, university students and cadets, as well as some from lower-middle-class or rural backgrounds.¹⁸⁸

Fighters were involved in a variety of military actions, including battles to defend 'lost' German lands in the Baltics, but their most notable action was against the left. The post-War SPD-led government, with Gustav Noske taking the lead, called upon them in numerous instances to suppress the revolutionary left, the *Freikorps* collaborating on these occasions to support the Republic they hated against what they saw as the even greater danger of Bolshevism.¹⁸⁹ They were not the only paramilitary formations to come into being in the period. Home Guards (*Einwohnerwehren*), for example, were militia that mobilised especially in rural areas, but these were not as explicitly counter-revolutionary, responding instead to broader fears of disorder and the protection of property.¹⁹⁰ If the War gave the radical right a new model for an ideal social order, the counter-revolutionary fights of the post-War period, especially those led by the *Freikorps*, provided the mobilising centre around which they coalesced, and a central element in the violent mythologies that sustained them through the Weimar period.¹⁹¹

In what follows, I will look at the constitution of radical right politics through an examination of some of the key writings that emerged out of the movement

188 Kater 1975, pp. 19–24.

189 Müller 1925a, pp. 91–114 remains one of the better accounts of the complex interplay of forces around the suppression of the revolution. On Noske, who he calls '[t]he most celebrated man of the bourgeoisie' (p. 107), he cites a passage praising Noske's muscular counterrevolutionary action from an article by Doris Wittner in the *Acht Uhr Abendblatt*: 'the lines of his movement remind one of Meunier's bronze men. One grasps the psyche of this man from his body [*Physis*]' (p. 107). This aestheticised masculinity suggests close links with radical right conceptions of male embodiment I will discuss here, and captures some of the political implications of the aesthetics of embodiment to which I will return in later chapters.

190 Schumann 2009, pp. 16–25; Ziemann 2007, pp. 227–40.

191 On the *Freikorps* mythologies, see Sprenger 2008. Sammartino 2004, pp. 123–88 develops a detailed analysis of the various motivations and interests of the *Freikorps* fighters in the specific contexts of post-War Germany. While the anti-Bolshevik tendencies were strong, and there were ideological and biographical links between the *Freikorps* fighters and the Nazis, these explicitly political goals and interests were more often the preserve of leaders, or read into the movement after the fact. The more mundane desire to secure stability through settlement in the Baltics, for example, seems to have been a primary motivation for many (pp. 142–47).

over the course of the Weimar period. These writings produced a counter-revolutionary politics through the constitution of a masculine, militarised body and subjectivity, what Bernd Weisbrod calls a 'male fundamentalism'.¹⁹² This has been noted by many commentators, who point to the importance of war and to the counter-revolutionary action against the left in the formation of radical right culture. Rarely, though, does the context traced in the previous chapter form the horizon for these accounts. The emergence of the radical right was certainly driven by a counter-revolutionary politics, but also by a reaction to the gendered dynamics of the conflicts of war.

The misogyny of the post-War radical right drew on a longer history of anti-feminism. Already before the War influential right-wing pressure groups were a staple of political life. Some, including the League for the Prevention of the Emancipation of Women,¹⁹³ had anti-feminism as their primary focus, while other larger organisations like the Pan-German League advocated against changes in the gendered order as part of a broader reactionary project.¹⁹⁴ The former group recognised the significance of women's activism already at the outset of war, writing to the government to express their worries over the establishment of the National Women's Service and arguing that 'the women's movement is the only large organisation – even the Social Democrats today are *true* fellow fighters – that, with a truly feminine lack of scruples, is making use of the distress of the Fatherland to further their own goals'.¹⁹⁵

Pre-War organisations tended to take the patriarchal social order as their touchstone, but for the radical right that emerged during and after the War it was a *Volkskörper* modelled on the two fronts that provided the horizon within which they operated. Emblematic of this orientation was the emergence in the later stages and in the aftermath of the War of an especially pernicious myth, the legend of the 'stab-in-the-back' (*Dolchstoßlegende*). The contention was that the army, undefeated on the field of battle and still possessed of the will to win, had been undermined and betrayed by traitorous forces within – inside the military itself in the form of shirkers, pacifists, or radical soldiers and sailors, and on the home front, with its various threats to military order. The myth was explicitly propagated by Ludendorff and others around the High Command. On 1 October 1918, as the cohesion of the army was becoming an important source of concern within the military, Ludendorff warned:

192 Weisbrod 2000.

193 Evans 1976, pp. 175–82.

194 Planert 1998; Breuer 2008, pp. 222–35.

195 Quoted in Kundrus 1995, p. 101.

Our own army is, unfortunately, heavily infected with the poison of Spartacist-Socialist ideas. There is no relying on the troops anymore... So it is to be expected that the enemy will succeed soon... Then our western army will lose its last self-control and, in complete chaos, flee back across the Rhine and bring revolution to Germany.¹⁹⁶

Notably, recognising the links between strikes on the home front and the conditions in the army, Ludendorff likened soldiers' resistance to the War to a labour action, contending that those who remained willing to fight 'would be greeted [by other soldiers] with the call of "strike-breaker" and asked not to fight anymore'.¹⁹⁷

Ludendorff's comments highlight a number of key aspects of the *Dolchstoßlegende*. It was not military defeat in the conventional sense,¹⁹⁸ but loss of the will to fight that was seen as the source of Germany's downfall. This loss of will was tied primarily to the influence of socialist ideas, but also more generally to a loss of control configured in the language of degeneration.¹⁹⁹

196 Quoted in Barth 2003, p. 79. Ludendorff's outburst, often cited as an originary moment in the formation of the legend, came at a small meeting of officers, among them Colonel Thaer who later recorded them. Stephenson 2009, pp. 189–92 argues that the front armies returning from the west in fact demobilised in a much more orderly and organised fashion than many historians have suggested (see also Bessel 1993). While this by no means meant that they remained effective as a fighting force as many proponents of the *Dolchstoßlegende* had it, he suggests that the sight of columns of troops marching back to Germany in formation worked to give the impression of an undefeated army, thus providing visual ammunition for those arguments.

197 Quoted in Barth 2003, p. 79.

198 Ludendorff's view was shared lower down the chain of command in this respect as well. The 11 November entry for the Second Battalion of the 31st *Landwehr* regiment, for example, captures the ambivalent feelings of its writer, who suggests that '[t]he report [of the armistice] was received with joy that the bloody war is henceforth at an end, and pride that, until the last moment, when weapons were laid down, the battalion was undefeated' (quoted in Stephenson 2009, p. 110). A similar perspective informed a 16 November communication to the V Reserve Corps that stressed the positive impact the returning troops could have: 'The dignified and earnest bearing of the troops should banish the despondency of the homeland; the farmers and middle class at home should see that an undefeated army returns in proud and unbowed bearing' (quoted in Stephenson 2009, p. 168). The stress on the middle class and farmers betrays the concerns of the writer, presumably reflecting the desire to buttress these segments of society against the growing working-class mobilisations.

199 The left had long been configured in similar ways, as Karl Liebknecht argued already before the War. For example, in his 1907 *Militarism and Anti-Militarism* he cites Bismarck's

In the *Dolchstoßlegende* and in the politics of the radical right these threats came from within the military, but even more so from the civilian home front.²⁰⁰ Along with socialists, others such as pacifists,²⁰¹ Jews, foreign workers, spies, protesting women, and the working class were depicted as key sources of betrayal. In broad terms, then, and especially in its radical right instantiations, the *Dolchstoßlegende* held a broad civilian, feminised ethos responsible for defeat. The myth was especially potent in mobilising the *Freikorps* against these multifarious threats,²⁰² but it had a wider currency. As Benjamin Ziemann argues, it was 'not only a political instrument wielded by interested parties [those around the German High Command in particular], but also and above all a means through which problems of social order could be rendered visible, and, more generally, made intellectually and emotionally understandable'.²⁰³

The true heroes of the myth were thus the undefeated soldiers who, in Ludendorff's terms, resisted the epithets of 'strike-breaker' and maintained their military posture. Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck became a key figure in this respect. He had been serving in German East Africa upon the outbreak of war in 1914 and, with his mixed force of German and East African soldiers, held out against all odds until 25 November 1918, his surrender coming only when he learned, weeks after the fact, of the end of the war in Europe. He thus became a key figure in the mythology of the undefeated army, with his exploits also helping to cement the importance of colonialism in the narrative of Weimar nationalism, a theme to which I will return in later chapters. Lettow-Vorbeck's book *Heia Safari!*, published in 1920, became a best-seller. His account of the War and his homecoming drew a direct link between the unity of August 1914 and the military as the body of the nation. Upon returning, he recounts, '[h]undreds of thousands cheered us on, cheered in pure joy despite the severe wounds that remained fresh. Pride emanated from them that we had held the flag high until the end, and that we had brought back unbesmirched a part of German soldierhood'.²⁰⁴ Lettow-Vorbeck and numerous other former colonial

1892 claim that '[t]he Social-Democratic problem is in fact a military problem' (1973, p. 3) and also the contention made in 1907 by the conservative newspaper *Kreuzzeitung* that Social Democracy, the enemy at home, is 'more dangerous than the enemy abroad, because it poisons the soul of our people and wrests the weapons from our hands before we have even lifted them' (1973, p. 4).

200 The first significant reference to a stab in the back came from Field Marshall von Hindenburg in November 1918 (Hindenburg 1994).

201 Chickering, 1975, pp. 392–410.

202 Sprenger 2008, pp. 62–103.

203 Ziemann 2002, p. 114.

204 Lettow-Vorbeck 1920, p. 281.

soldiers would go on to play key roles in the *Freikorps*, their military experience with colonial counter-insurgency brought into action against the left in Germany.

The idea of the undefeated army was especially prevalent in the military hierarchy and on the right, but even the new president, the SPD's Friedrich Ebert, parroted the claim that the army 'is returning home undefeated'.²⁰⁵ The SPD's frequent endorsement of these nationalist tropes was indicative of their position in the post-War balance of forces. In seeking to sustain a reformist project against the revolutionary left, the SPD hierarchy continued the conciliatory politics of the War, acting in concert with the right against the revolutionary left.²⁰⁶ The right in turn was also happy to conclude these tactical alliances, but both the older established élites and the new radical right never lost their fundamentally anti-socialist politics. The signing of the Treaty of Versailles by the SPD-led government strengthened this violent antipathy on their part, and made the *Dolchstoßlegende* an absolute article of faith. The signing was widely condemned as a capitulation that imposed a variety of punitive clauses limiting German sovereignty and burdening the country with massive reparations payments.²⁰⁷

Even though the SPD-led government had little choice but to sign the Treaty, they were portrayed as responsible for this further stab in the back, feeding the strategy of Ludendorff, the German high command, and various conservative forces to shift blame onto the left as a way of preparing the ground for counter-revolutionary action.²⁰⁸ The left, including the SPD, had enabled what the German National Party representative Albrecht Philipp called the 'thousands of small "stabs in the back"' ²⁰⁹ that enabled the victory of Germany's enemies.

205 Quoted in Barth 2003, p. 214. Barth suggests that Ebert deployed the phrase tactically (it had been written by a military officer) without a full appreciation of its implications. Barth stresses that it was not only the military or political hierarchy that put forward the view of the undefeated army, but that it was widespread, expressed even by civilians welcoming soldiers back from the front (see pp. 212–20).

206 On left responses to the *Dolchstoßlegende* during the Weimar years, see Sammet 2002.

207 On the Treaty and its receptions, see Krumeich 2001. Süchting-Hänger 2001 highlights the importance of conservative women in propagating the arguments. Allied restrictions on what could be said were imposed more strongly on men, meaning that women took a more prominent role.

208 Given that the Catholic Centre Party was a signatory to the Treaty, they were put in a similar ambivalent position as the SPD, in some cases responding with a defensive compensatory nationalism, but in others (for example, in the pages of the *Allgemeine Rundschau*) taking a pacifist position that accepted German war guilt (see Munro 1996).

209 Quoted in Schulz 2004, p. 48.

As Boris Barth argues, it was in fact the military's impossible demands for the home front to sustain production at levels that could match the output of the Allies that generated the hunger, protest, and delegitimisation of the state discussed earlier, and that then fed into the *Dolchstoßlegende*.²¹⁰

The militarised response of the radical right can be read in this context as an attempt to embody a national will untrammelled by such material concerns. As Klaus Theweleit has famously argued, radical right writers performed a violently misogynist politics of militarised control, with armoured bodies constituted through the violent repulsion of all feminine flows.²¹¹ The *Dolchstoßlegende* provided the distillation of this orientation, with the feminised home front displacing any military or economic sources of defeat. During the War, as we have seen, but also after, this dynamic configured the home front as an existential threat to the national body. Defence of borders against both external and internal enemies was thus constitutive of radical right politics. The loss of territories after the War was crucial in this respect, often depicted as an 'amputation' of limbs from the *Volkskörper*.²¹²

The radical right turn away from more traditional forms of conservatism associated with patriarchal values suggests a new, more modern orientation. Indeed, much of the academic debate over the radical right has turned on this question of their 'modern' nature. One of the more influential accounts of the radical right comes from Jeffrey Herf, who uses the term 'reactionary modernism' to describe their orientation. He argues that the radical right was an expression of 'a cultural paradox of German modernity, namely, the embrace of modern technology by German thinkers who rejected Enlightenment reason'.²¹³ He develops this argument on the basis of the *Sonderweg* thesis, suggesting that the radical right was able to gain influence because of the relative weakness of liberalism and its attendant institutions compared to Germany's level of industrial development.²¹⁴ As I argued in the introduction, however, this approach to German history has its limits, in Herf's case seeing him hold onto a notion of conservatism as 'anti-modern'. As Thomas Rohkrämer argues, the 'reactionary modernist' paradox is only a paradox if one accepts the

210 Barth 2003, pp. 11–53. These contradictions emerged especially in the second half of the War and the increasingly industrial character taken on by the War after the battle of the Somme.

211 Theweleit 1987 and 1989.

212 Conze 2007, p. 26.

213 Herf 1984, p. 1.

214 Herf 1984, p. 10 sets this aspect of his argument out most explicitly.

dubious contention that conservatives are naturally suspicious of technology and rationality.²¹⁵

The equation of technology and Enlightenment rationality in Herf's argument ends up buttressing a liberal faith in the progressive nature of the latter. Herf constructs his argument through a rather caricatured reading of Adorno and Horkheimer's thesis in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, arguing that their analysis 'was imprisoned in the limits of Marxist theory'²¹⁶ and that they 'generalized Germany's miseries into dilemmas of modernity per se. Consequently they blamed the Enlightenment for what was really a result of its [Germany's] weakness'.²¹⁷ The problem with Germany, he contends, was that there was 'not enough' liberalism, reason, or Enlightenment,²¹⁸ as if these are elements that can be measured rather than complex social processes to be analysed. Ironically, Herf also misses the extent to which *Dialectic of Enlightenment* marks a break from dominant Marxist interpretations of fascism and the development of capitalism, with that work advancing a theory of the administered society and the primacy of politics over economics that, depending on one's perspective, renovated or abandoned a Marxist analysis. Herf misses Adorno and Horkheimer's key argument, namely that the unfolding of Enlightenment rationality was dialectically constituted through a repression of myth, to which it then reverts. Trying to extract a 'true' rationality misses precisely the dialectical character of Enlightenment, and capitalism, itself. Herf's argument therefore performs precisely the false separation of reason from myth that Horkheimer and Adorno argue marks the march of Enlightenment reason.²¹⁹

Adorno's study of Oswald Spengler, one of the key figures on the Weimar radical right, highlights some of the interpretive riches missed by Herf. Adorno goes so far as to argue that 'Spengler is one of the theoreticians of extreme reaction whose critique of liberalism proved itself superior in many respects

215 Rohkrämer 1999, pp. 29–50.

216 Herf 1984, p. 233.

217 Herf 1984, p. 10.

218 Herf 1984, p. 234.

219 One of the interesting aspects of Herf's study is that he highlights the significance of engineers as bearers of reactionary modernist ideology and practice (1984, pp. 152–88). Significantly, in his account of the dialectic of enlightenment Horkheimer points to engineers as key figures in the repressive march of instrumental rationality: 'The engineer's mind is that of industrialism in its streamlined form. His purposeful rule would make men an agglomeration of instruments without a purpose of their own' (1967, p. 102). Rather than an embodiment of the contradictions between technology and Enlightenment rationality, the engineer stands in Horkheimer's work as the embodiment of the apotheosis of that rationality itself.

to the progressive one'.²²⁰ In a comment that could be directed at Herf, Adorno contends that:

To escape the charmed circle of Spengler's morphology it is not enough to defame barbarism and rely on the health of culture. Spengler could laugh in the face of such blissful confidence. Rather, it is the barbaric element in culture itself which must be recognized. The only considerations that have a chance of surviving Spengler's verdict are those which challenge the idea of culture as well as the reality of barbarism.²²¹

The dynamism of Spengler's work is ultimately sterile, mirroring relations of domination and reverting 'unobtrusively into a justification of the merely existent'.²²²

Many of the approaches to the radical right tend to miss the extent to which, as a movement, it was responding to the contradictions of capitalist modernity in ways that, as Adorno suggests of Spengler, were more profound than any liberal progressivism. The term 'reactionary modernism' implies some of these interpretive problems with its attempt to salvage 'modernism' for the Enlightenment project. Similarly, the term 'conservative revolutionary', used already in Hugo von Hofmannsthal's 1927 claim that what was coming in Germany was 'no less than a Conservative Revolution, and will be of a magnitude previously unseen in European history', shares a tendency to see radical right ideology as contradictory rather than rooting those contradictions in capitalist modernity itself.²²³ Indeed, for those on the right it was precisely that overcoming of these contradictions that they set as their goal. This did often involve a hybrid of older and newer conservatism that, as one writer put it, evoking a common right-wing appropriation of the term socialism, was both '*Völkisch* and socialistic'.²²⁴ For Alma de l'Aigles, the conservative revolution

220 Adorno 1981, p. 65.

221 Adorno 1981, pp. 71–72.

222 Adorno 1981, p. 65.

223 Quoted in Travers 2001, p. 2. Travers' title, *Critics of Modernity*, highlights his own investment in this understanding of the right. This perspective also enables the inclusion of a wide range of people under the conservative revolutionary banner, including those like Thomas Mann who, as we saw earlier, proclaimed the War as a struggle for and over German culture (Bullivant 1985). For a good overview of the different currents, see Mohler and Weissmann 2005.

224 This was the title of a work by Stapel 1919. For other examples from the same journal, the *Jungdeutsche Stimmen* (*Young German Voices*), see Gerber 1919b; Hartmann 1919.

sought 'to eliminate the disharmony between the eternal Idea and its temporal distinction'.²²⁵

Others on the right dispensed with even these gestures to an older conservatism. For Arthur Moeller van den Bruck, the author of the 1922 tract *The Third Reich*, traditional conservatism had little to say in the modern world.²²⁶ Thus, as I argue elsewhere, those on the right configured their political programmes as a kind of radical right socialism or communism, mobilising the language of the left in the service of a radical national politics.²²⁷ This mobilisation of socialist ideas had its roots in the War when writers from a variety of political perspectives proposed that the *Planwirtschaft*, the planned economy of the War, provided a specifically German form of socialism against the materialism of both English capitalism and Marxist socialism.²²⁸ The industrialised battlefield rather than the pastoral countryside was the model for this new politics; the *Volkskörper* was its bodily form.

As Adorno suggested, one of the most articulate proponents of this view was Oswald Spengler, whose *Decline of the West* was published in two volumes between 1918 and 1922. While Spengler conceived of his work in part as a manual for statecraft speaking to the policy-making élite,²²⁹ the work gained a huge readership in Germany and abroad, channelling the anxieties and desires of the period through a powerful conceptualisation of world history. Spengler's overriding thesis was relatively simple: all world-historical Cultures, each of which is a totality governed by a single organising principle, go through a series of stages, from birth through adolescence and on to death. There are a limited number of these Cultures (he names the Classical [Ancient Greek], Chinese, Indian, Magian [Jewish and Muslim], occasionally the Aztec, and finally the West), and each of these has followed the same law-like trajectory mirroring the human life cycle. In the initial stages each Culture emerges and develops organically through its unique organising principle (in the West, for example,

225 l'Aigles 1919, p. 301.

226 Moeller 1931, pp. 243–99.

227 Heynen 2012. Spengler himself had an essay on 'Prussianism and Socialism', while Ernst Jünger's project can be understood as a sustained attempt to produce a radical-right socialism, an orientation especially explicit in his book *The Worker*.

228 Fries 1994, 1, pp. 216–19. The economist Johann Plenge argued in 1916, for example, that '[u]nder the deprivation of the war the socialist idea took effect in German life, its organisation developed in a new spirit, and thus the self-assertion of our nation was born for humanity out of the idea of 1914, the idea of German organization, the people's community [*Volksgenossenschaft*] of a national socialism' (quoted in Fries 1994, 1, pp. 216–17).

229 Farrenkopf 2001, p. 20.

this was what he calls the Faustian idea of infinite space), culminating in a florescence of cultural production. It then begins to harden, and a decline sets in.

Decay and degeneration are thus inherent in the logic of Cultures. In the final stage (which Spengler says is the stage in which Europe finds itself) Culture hardens and becomes Civilisation. He finds this descent into Civilisation in all great Cultures: '[t]he Civilization is the inevitable *destiny* of the Culture'.²³⁰ Civilisation is the age of world-cities, science and abstract thought, imperialism, and technology. It is the final stage, the end and fulfillment of the history of a Culture. In one sense, then, Spengler is expressing the common distinction often made between a Germanic Culture (*Kultur*) and a mechanistic and materialistic Civilisation (*Zivilisation*) associated with England and France. Indeed, much of the right-wing thought of the 1920s was founded on the contrasting conceptions of the national border as a 'blood- and body-less, primarily mathematical abstraction' or as a 'three-dimensional bodily border of flesh and blood [*dreidimensionaler, durchbluteter Grenzkörper*]', to use Karl Haushofer's pungent phrasing.²³¹ Spengler gives this a twist, arguing that the dichotomy of Culture and Civilisation is internal to cultural development, removing it somewhat from its national(ist) context. The implication of his argument is that the decline of the West is unavoidable, and that neither a nostalgic desire for an organic past nor a belief in modern regeneration are tenable positions. His anti-nostalgia was shared with others on the radical right, although most continued to dream of a national regeneration.²³²

Spengler rejected the claim that his work entailed a fatalistic or pessimistic orientation, arguing in 1921 in response to critics of the first volume that '[m]y aim was to present an image of the world to be lived with, rather than to devise a system for professional philosophers to brood over'.²³³ This rejection of the contemplative mode is where Spengler's vision most clearly links up with others on the radical right. For Spengler, a technologised conception of an activist *will* ran through his work, a celebration of a metallic and totally integrated

230 Spengler 1928, 1, p. 31.

231 Quoted in Conze 2007, p. 34.

232 In *Die Rettung des Abendlandes*, a radical nationalist fantasy from 1921, for example, Ernst Otto Montanus argued against Spengler's pessimism, claiming that *Decline of the West* threatened to lead the *Volk* into resignation, and that it contradicted the spirit of the *Frontkämpfer*, the front soldiers. As Peter Fisher argues, '*Frontkämpfer* and *völkisch* nationalists like Montanus (and Hitler) viewed the highbrow Spengler with antibourgeois, anti-intellectual contempt', despite their respect for his authoritarian and martial ideals (1991, p. 26). Fisher also quotes Hitler's claim that 'I am no follower of Spengler's. I do not believe in the decline of the West' (p. 226n12).

233 Spengler 1967, p. 134.

order. Technology, he argues, is at the heart of the greatness of the Faustian West, with the engineer having pride of place. Spengler concludes *Decline of the West* with a brief discussion of the conflict between the entrepreneur or manager and the factory worker, a theme familiar to viewers of Fritz Lang's later film *Metropolis*. As in the film, Spengler argues that the entrepreneur and the factory worker represent the division between intellectual and manual labour – the head and the hand in *Metropolis*. A third term is needed to bind the two, but where the film offers the humanist solution of the heart as the mediator, Spengler gives the radical right answer: the engineer is 'the priest of the machine ... the machine's master and destiny'.²³⁴

The engineer thus embodies a resolution of the contradictions of capitalist modernity – it is key here to remember that Spengler was writing in the context of the post-War revolutionary struggles between workers (hands) and bosses (mind) – but there is another opposing principle that embodies the final stage of Civilisation: money. It represents the final subsumption of the material, of the earth, into the intangibility of finance, a final 'conflict *between* money and blood'.²³⁵ This familiar theme of the degenerative power of liquid money and the ephemerality of finance to destroy the soul of a people, a perspective that often underlay anti-Semitic discourses, is raised to an inexorable historical law. The engineer and, more broadly, militarised technology, are bound up with blood, a kind of modernist atavism damming the flows of money. Here we are back at the point raised in the introduction. Marx's characterisation of capitalism as a system in which 'all that is solid melts into air' underlies Spengler's critique of Civilisation, but this characteristic is abstracted from social relations and is reified as money. As we shall see in the next chapter, Spengler was not alone in performing this sleight of hand; the sociology of Georg Simmel is another famous example, albeit from a very different political position. For Spengler and the radical right, though, this approach grounded a dichotomous metaphysics of violent will.

The belief in will that was evident in Spengler's work was analogous to that which fed the legend of the 'stab-in-the-back'. Paul von Hindenburg, the head of the army during the War and the future president of the Republic, testified to the Constituent Assembly in November 1919 that *will* is what set the German military apart from the numerically and materially superior enemy. 'At the time we still hoped that the *will to victory* would dominate everything else', but

234 Spengler 1928, 2, p. 505. Writing in *Jungdeutsche Stimmen*, Hans Gerber 1919a, argues that the distinction itself is false, produced by socialist practices that divide the *Volksgemeinschaft*.

235 Spengler 1928, 2, p. 506.

that hope was dashed by revolutionary soldiers and the weakness of the home front.²³⁶ The significance of the engineer for Spengler is not simply that he can produce more goods or, in the case of war, more weapons; if that were the case, as Hindenburg argued, the German army was lost. Rather, the engineer embodied a will that fulfilled the promise of a machine age.

The dichotomy that emerges in Spengler's work maps onto that of the home and fighting front: '[w]ar is the creator, hunger the destroyer, of all great things. In war life is elevated by death, often to that point of irresistible force whose mere existence guarantees victory, but in the economic life hunger awakens the ugly, vulgar, and wholly unmetaphysical sort of fearfulness for one's life under which the higher form-world of a Culture miserably collapses and the naked struggle for existence of the human beasts begins.'²³⁷ The struggle against hunger that characterised the home front during the War is reduced here to a vulgar bestiality threatening the greatness of war. In *Decline of the West* this is raised to a transhistorical phenomenon, the gendered dynamic of the two fronts subtending all cultural development and degeneration. This struggle is thus an existential moment in which, as with the *Dolchstoßlegende*, a Culture or a nation faces extinction. Given this existential threat, then, it is not surprising that for Spengler as for others on the radical right, the response was a powerful and violent reiteration of the contours of the individual and social body, the 'form-world', against the degenerating impacts of the merely physical.

As mentioned earlier, one significant corollary of the reconfiguration of the notion of borders by the radical right was that their politics was not inscribed solely in a national or nationalist frame. As Marcus Bullock argues in a discussion of Ernst Jünger, '[t]he fronts that traversed the continent of Europe and separated nations and alliances only marked lines of division according to the politics of the state. According to the peculiar erotics of experience enacted in this ancient rite of blood, the lines the opposing forces drew up in their trenches, barbed wire entanglements, and gun emplacements, were more like the seams that knit up the tattered patchwork of nations and restored the singular spirit of youth and courage'.²³⁸ This is a kind of radical right internationalism, ironically emerging out of a War that so profoundly split the left over the question of proletarian internationalism. Indeed, Ari Sammartino argues that many of the *Freikorps* fighters in the Baltics felt a profound alienation from a Germany that, to them, had descended into socialist chaos and had rejected

236 Hindenburg 1994, p. 15.

237 Spengler 1928, 2, p. 471.

238 Bullock 1998, p. 568.

them; paramilitary fighting and ultimately settlement in the east would provide the context for a reterritorialising of an essential Germanness.²³⁹ The radical right was picking up here on a broader set of anxieties around the threat of revolution to national borders that was expressed even by the SPD. Thus, a Party leaflet from early 1919 warned of the threat of the revolutionary 'terroristic minority' who would enable 'armies of foreign peoples to breach the eastern borders'. The relationship between internal and external borders was clear in their call: '[g]et in touch with volunteer associations [*Freiwilligenverbänden*, in this case including *Freikorps* units], which the government has assembled to secure the border and maintain law and order within the country'.²⁴⁰

The ambivalence of the radical right towards the nation thus expressed itself in a kind of nationalist internationalism. Spengler and Jünger both conceived of Germany within a broader European culture, with the latter frequently expressing his comradeship with the worthy enemies he faced, in particular the English. Ernst von Salomon, another key radical right author, contended that in the War the two sides did not represent opposing ideals, but rather that the War itself provided a shared (Western) experience.²⁴¹ The threat of degeneration was thus also shared, and came from the amorphous proliferation of threats to the *Volkskörper* often represented by the home front. This cultural nation was also then portable, enacted in the east as well as on colonial terrain. Lettow-Vorbeck, for example, exhorted youth to learn from his defence of German colonies in East Africa: '[j]ust as the revitalisation of energy, blood flowing through the veins, and the breathing of fresh air are necessary for the individual if the body and spirit are to be healthy, this is also required for our sick *Volkskörper*. Labour must again flow in and out and, through our great trading cities, must again breathe the sea air'.²⁴² Here we have a colonial social hygiene in which the biologised nation is coterminous with the global circulation of goods and bodies.

The primary locus of national regeneration for the radical right, however, was found in the experience of the fighting front during the War, and it is here that we can see most clearly the links to the gendered dynamics of war. Ernst Jünger's work was undoubtedly the most prominent and influential in this regard. Jünger had fought at the front as a storm trooper, had been decorated, and went on to become one of the most significant writers of the radical right in the Weimar period. He regained prominence after the Second World War,

239 Sammartino 2004, pp. 166–70.

240 Quoted in Müller 1925a, p. 113.

241 Salomon 1930, p. 104.

242 Lettow-Vorbeck 1920, p. 282.

writing and enjoying increasing recognition up to his death in 1998 at the age of 103.²⁴³ His work, in particular his war memoir *Storm of Steel*, first published in 1920 and subsequently rewritten on several occasions, provided the most influential radical right meditation on the significance of war; despite the differences Jünger had with the Nazis, Goebbels called it a 'war gospel, cruelly great'.²⁴⁴ Many of the themes evident in Spengler's work returned with Jünger, but he grounded them more concretely in the life of the front. By the late 1920s and early 1930s he developed this front experience into a totalising social critique and a model of social order embodied in the figure of 'the Worker'.²⁴⁵ A new man emerged out of Jünger's battlefields, the ruins of the front giving birth to a machinic figure who Jünger argued embodied a regenerated social order; by the time he wrote *The Worker* in the early 1930s, he conceived of this order on a planetary scale.²⁴⁶

The purging of a feminised degeneracy was at the heart of Jünger's work. His novels, essays and other writings provide a sustained critique of Weimar society and politics from the perspective of war and the experience of the front. His disgust with the post-War order, and with a corrupt materialist order more generally, was almost total, and was consistently articulated through a dread of degeneration and disease. 'Democratic sentiments?' he asked rhetorically in *Copse 125*, another autobiographical novel set at the front. 'I hate democracy as I do the plague'.²⁴⁷ For Jünger, the future could only be found in the decidedly non-democratic iron order of the battlefield and it could only be brought into being through an implacable war against any threatening or degenerative heterogeneity. War was thus both model for the utopian social order, and means for its attainment.

Jünger's texts operated in this dual fashion as well, acting as a sort of agit-prop literature for the right. The texts themselves were constructed as models for the desired social order, violently regimented narratives, often in the form of diaries, which were carefully written to exclude what he saw as effete literary flourishes.²⁴⁸ Spengler offers a similar critique of literary production, arguing

243 On Jünger's life and work, see Nevin 1996; Bullock 1992; Neaman 1999.

244 Quoted in Neaman 1999, p. 39.

245 See especially his 1932 book by that name (Jünger 1981).

246 Jünger 1981, pp. 304–6.

247 Jünger 1930a, p. 83. This passage was purged from later editions of the book (see Neaman 1999, p. 229).

248 Klaus Theweleit's *Male Fantasies* uses the voluminous writings of the radical right as its basis. He argues that this writing represents the compulsive inscription of bodily borders and psychic borders without which the radical right subject

that the journalism of the stage of Civilisation 'substitutes for the old thoughtfulness an *intellectual male-prostitution* of speech and writing, which fills and dominates the halls and the market-places of the megalopolis'.²⁴⁹ Again here we see the use of the figure of the prostitute in condemning modern civilisation, linked in turn to the degenerative influence of the city and the market. The true writer is thus akin to the soldier who, at the fighting front, avoids these civilian entanglements; this argument radicalises that of the 93 intellectuals and others who associated war with German Culture earlier in the War.²⁵⁰

Jünger's depiction of the front as the alternative to the plague of democracy was outlined more explicitly in many of his contributions to the right-wing press in the mid-1920s. His 1925 essay 'The Front Soldier and Internal Politics', for instance, is built around the reconfigured notions of 'internal' and 'external' that I have argued marked the politics of the radical right. Rather than national borders, the key dichotomy here is between the ethos of the front and that of democracy; the soldier offers the possibility for the transcendence of these divisions through the purging of degeneracy.²⁵¹ Increasingly, though, Jünger also looked to the figure of the Worker to describe this new man, explicitly laying claim to the terrain of the left. The soldier of the First World War was an *industrial* soldier, a new type of embodied subject commensurate to new forms of war.²⁵² These soldiers

have been reared in the fiery centres of modern industry and from childhood on know the ways and power of our era. They are more deeply embedded in the contemporary world, whose secrets and marvels shine through cold exteriors. They sense the elemental spirit stirring in the explosive power of steel and the atom, in the crackling of radio waves. This also represents a return to the more fundamental; these men have

threatens to come apart (see especially 1989, pp. 231–33). See also Huyssen 1995, pp. 127–43; Heynen 2012.

249 Spengler 1928, 1, p. 360.

250 Fries 1994, 2, pp. 46–51.

251 'Der Frontsoldat und die innere Politik' in Jünger 2001, pp. 146–52. See also Jünger's 'Revolution und Frontsoldatentum' in Jünger 2001, pp. 57–63, where he highlights Hitler's Munich putsch as one example of possible political action. By the early 1930s Jünger had become critical of the Nazis, in part because of their crude biological racism, but in his writings of the 1920s there were instances where he indicated a greater sympathy for their goals.

252 'Arbeiter und Soldaten des 20. Jahrhunderts' in Jünger 2001, pp. 425–34, written in 1928, gives an early statement of this view later developed more fully in *The Worker*.

their aeroplanes under control as an [Aboriginal] Australian his boomerang.²⁵³

Crucially, then, while this soldier is wholly modern, he also taps into an eternal soldierly substratum; the primitivist invocation of the Australian Aboriginal cements this trans-historical moment.²⁵⁴

Especially by the later 1920s Jünger stressed the roots of the soldier in the disciplined iron order of the factory.²⁵⁵ The figures of the soldier and worker dominate the anti-political politics that he developed most systematically in 1932 in *The Worker*, embodying the social and political order that would transcend liberal parliamentarism. The Worker represents what he calls a new 'Gestalt' expressed through the social totality, the 'state of total mobilization'.²⁵⁶ This is a radical right version of the *Volkskörper*, an *embodied* totality (Jünger frequently uses the term *Verkörpert* ['embodied']) in which the individual body of the worker or soldier merges into an integrated social totality that transcends and transforms its individual moments. The significance of the body is most evident at the moment of death, especially the violent death of the battlefield where bodily life reaches its apogee. Jünger's worker-body and soldier-body are not material bodies, however, but represent a transcendent moment: 'not the slightest connection exists between the body at the second of its death and the corpse that then appears'.²⁵⁷ Death is the moment of fulfilment of the social order, the point at which the bourgeois dichotomy between individual and society is transcended and the new man discovers that it is 'in blood sacrifice that his most significant expression is won'.²⁵⁸ In *Storm of Steel* he describes being shot late in the War and thinking he is about to die: '[s]trangely, that moment is one of very few in my life of which I am able to say

253 Jünger 1930a, p. 88 (translation modified).

254 As I will discuss in the next three chapters, this primitivist moment ran through Weimar culture.

255 Interestingly, the German military establishment prior to the War had preferred rural and small-town recruits, believing that industrial environments produced enervated men with urban vices. With the onset of war this shifted, with urbanites and workers seen as the ideal candidates for the new, industrial form of warfare (see Showalter 2000, pp. 87–89). Jünger's argument is thus tightly linked with the military thinking of the period.

256 Jünger 1981, pp. 33–48; see also his essay 'Total Mobilization' (Jünger 1993). Jünger's critique of liberalism in these works has points of connection with those developed by the left, but for Jünger the idea of totality embodies not a revolutionary or emancipatory politics, but the principles of violence, domination, and the hierarchy of the front writ large.

257 Jünger 1981, p. 36.

258 Jünger 1981, p. 38.

they were utterly happy. I understood, as in a flash of lighting, the true inner purpose and form of my life'.²⁵⁹

The worker state thus enables the formation of what Jünger calls in different places a new gender and a new race²⁶⁰ as the embodied forms of the new social and political order, although he insists that this concept of race 'has nothing to do with the biological concept of race'.²⁶¹ The new state is, however, violently anti-bourgeois and anti-liberal. Jünger argues that the rise of the Worker will involve the 'transformation [*Ablösung*] of the liberal, formal democracy [*Gesellschaftsdemokratie*] through work or state democracy'.²⁶² These bodily and social transformations are highly mediated by technology, the new race taking the form of a kind of hybrid or cyborg body that has as much to do with engineering as biology.²⁶³ Jünger's work is thus clearly about more than a 'reactionary modernism' that brings technology together with anti-rational thinking; indeed, it embodies a terrifying integrative rationality in the face of which, as Adorno suggested of Spengler's work, a liberal critique is wholly inadequate. It is a particularly radical version of what Cornelius Castoriadis has characterised as 'the fantasy of total control, of our will or desire for mastering all objects and all circumstances' that is at the heart of Western technological rationality.²⁶⁴

Jünger's investments in the cyborg body are most evident in his interest in photography. In *The Worker* he identifies photography with broader social changes characteristic of modern life, arguing that the medium had given rise to a new aesthetics bound up with the abolition and transcending of older bourgeois practices. The first photographic portraits had already begun to 'blur the borders between art and technology', a shift that changed 'what one

259 Jünger 2003, p. 281. As noted earlier, Jünger frequently rewrote his works, none more so than *Storm of Steel* which appeared first in 1920. This more recent English translation is based on the 1961 rewriting of the book.

260 For example, see Jünger 1981, on gender p. 30, on race pp. 177–82.

261 Jünger 1981, p. 152.

262 Jünger 1981, p. 268.

263 These connections were highlighted by Walter Benjamin in his 'Theories of German Fascism', a review of the book *Krieg und Krieger* edited by Jünger in which his essay 'Total Mobilization' was published (in Benjamin 1999b, pp. 312–21).

264 Quoted in Robbins and Webster 1999, p. 151. Robbins and Webster argue that this phenomenon is driven especially by military practice, in particular through the growing importance of information in warfare. This 'totalitarian' impulse at the heart of militarised capitalism parallels a number of the arguments I have made here, including in relation to the role of information and communication in war.

understands a “good face” to be.²⁶⁵ This ‘good face’ was precisely that which he sought to reflect in a series of photo-books for which he served as editor or contributor in the late 1920s and early 1930s. These books developed a radical right aesthetics, tracing new forms of modern subjectivity and the front experience in which they found their ideal home. While Jünger never gave up writing novels, photography gave him a new and in many ways more accessible medium for his agitprop literature, a mechanical means through which the modern machinic body could be reproduced.²⁶⁶

For Jünger, the photographs in these lavish works were more than just illustrations; photography itself was an integral part of the military-technological apparatus that enabled a new consciousness. In ‘War and Photography’ (‘Krieg und Lichtbild’), his introductory essay to the photo collection *The Face of the World War*, Jünger argued that the mass of information thrown up by technological war requires precise forms of documentation to capture the meaning of the militarised state. Here photography has a privileged place. Along with artillery and guns, he says, countless lenses were trained on the battlefield, serving as ‘instruments of a technological consciousness’²⁶⁷ that preserved the image of this devastated yet generative landscape. As with his writing, Jünger conceived of this archive of images not simply as a passive recording of war, but rather as a tool that could enable those who did not experience the front to do so through a medium adequate to its object. The photographic archive crystallised the new constellation of technology, subjectivity, the body, politics, and aesthetic form.

Militarised technology itself was not the driving force of these social changes, however. Looking specifically at the significance of the tank in another essay in the collection *The Face of the World War*, Jünger argues that ‘[i]t is a means of expression [*Ausdrucksmittel*] of a new military epoch, just as the machine itself represents not the beginning, but rather the expression, of a new epoch of the spirit.’²⁶⁸ Technology is thus but the outward form of a spiritual transformation brewing beneath the surface.

265 Jünger 1981, p. 129.

266 The books on war with which Jünger was involved include Jünger 1930b and the companion volume Junior nd. Jünger also contributed to two other photo books (Bucholtz 1931 and Schultz 1933) that were about modern life more generally. Images in the books were taken from a range of sources, from government archives to the private collections of soldiers. For a discussion of these works, see Werneburg 1992, pp. 42–64; Apel 1999, pp. 49–84.

267 ‘Krieg und Lichtbild’, in Jünger 1930b, p. 10.

268 ‘Krieg und Technik’, in Jünger 1930b, p. 236.

Its [the First World War's] fragmentary character is based on the technology being able to destroy the traditional forms of war. From within itself, however, it could only intimate – without being able to realise – a new image of war. In this process, the world war mirrors our life – the spirit behind the technology was able to destroy old attachments while it has not yet left the experimental stage with respect to building a new order constituted by its own means.²⁶⁹

The battlefield was thus the leading edge of transformations that were reshaping all areas of human life. The modern moment was the 'moment of danger', as Ferdinand Bucholtz's 1931 photobook was entitled.²⁷⁰ The images in Bucholtz's book trace these moments of danger, ranging from natural disasters to industrial accidents and car crashes. More precisely, as we saw earlier with the Australian Aboriginal, the exponential increase in danger made possible by the destructive potential of new industrial processes and technologies was the modern expression of a fundamental and primal human nature. The book links this moment of danger directly to political struggles waged by the radical right. A significant portion of the book celebrates counter-revolutionary violence with writings and photographs that include: an excerpt from Ernst von Salomon's memoir *The Outlaws* recounting the assassination of Walter Rathenau; photographs of the *Freikorps*; and depictions of colonial violence. In the introductory essay to the book, 'On Danger', Jünger argued that from the bourgeois perspective danger appears as the opposite of reason, fuelling a desire for security. Jünger, though, rejects the slogan of 'Peace and Order' (*Ruhe und Ordnung*) – which was also the counter-revolutionary slogan endorsed by the SPD in the immediate post-War years – celebrating instead the Gestalt of the warrior, the artist, and the criminal who tap directly into what he calls the Elemental, the universal substratum underlying the transient moment.²⁷¹

Jünger's work is arguably both a celebration of the alienated body of capitalist modernity, and a performance of a violent masculinity through which that alienation can be contained. Again here the stab-in-the-back legend, in which a series of degenerative forces emanating from the home front undermine bodily unity, is raised to a fundamental principle. Thus, he writes, where pacifists do their work 'there civilization emits the first scent of decay'.²⁷² Civilian life more broadly produced profound feelings of disgust in Jünger and in

²⁶⁹ 'Krieg und Technik', in Jünger 1930b, p. 237.

²⁷⁰ Bucholtz 1931.

²⁷¹ Jünger 1931.

²⁷² Jünger 1930a, p. 57.

others on the radical right. Franz Sontag's 1931 *Never Again War!?*, a novel whose title subverts a key pacifist slogan, describes the decommissioning of an officer: '[s]o he had finally become a civilian – what a repulsive thought! . . . internally torn, only half a man'.²⁷³ The body and subjectivity of the officer literally embody the gendered dichotomy of the two fronts, a split that radical right cultural production and political action sought violently and compulsively to weld together through the extermination of the feminine.

In many radical right texts this fundamental misogyny was expressed through a graphic violence against women, but in Jünger's case it manifested as a powerful repression of *any* representations of women. His accounts of leaves from the front, for example, are terse and include little of family or other civilian/feminine engagements. One brief mention is telling, however. At the end of *Storm of Steel*, after Jünger is wounded, he is rushed to a dressing-station. In the later 1961 rewriting of the novel he merely states that '[t]hen I was in the hands of the sisters',²⁷⁴ but in the 1924 version we get a slightly longer account. 'Though I am no misogynist', he claims, 'I was always irritated by the presence of women every time that the fate of battle threw me into the bed of a hospital ward. One sank, after the manly and purposeful activities of the War, into a vague atmosphere of warmth'.²⁷⁵ These various forces against which Jünger seeks to do battle are thus characterised as formless womanly dispersion.²⁷⁶

It is not surprising that nurses bear the brunt of his animosity. They represented the only large-scale female presence at the front and, as Klaus Theweleit details, they emerged as perhaps the most fraught and powerful symbol of femininity in the writings of the radical right.²⁷⁷ The position of the nurse highlights not only the complexities of the gender politics of the radical right, but also their class politics and their relations to older forms of conservatism. Indeed, nursing was deeply rooted in the conservative women's movement, offering an opportunity for work to unmarried bourgeois and aristocratic

273 Quoted in Fisher 1991, p. 21.

274 Jünger 2003.

275 Jünger 1930c, p. 314. He does qualify this: 'The clear objectivity of the Catholic nursing sisterhoods afforded a welcome exception. I found with them an atmosphere very congenial to soldiering' (p. 314).

276 Richard Evans 1976 argues that while some anti-feminist agitation focused specifically on attacking the women's movement, '[f]or most anti-feminists, however, feminism meant something much more diffuse and vague. It meant the negation of the values they were concerned to assert; pacifism instead of militarism, rights instead of duties, individualism instead of collectivism, social criticism instead of social solidarity, reform instead of reaction' (p. 182).

277 Theweleit 1987, pp. 79–100.

women that had been gained only after considerable struggle. Embodying feminine values of care and service, as Lora Wildenthal argues in her study of colonial women, '[n]ursing offered a conservative resolution to conflicts raised by women's efforts at participation'.²⁷⁸ Based in modern medical practices, nursing offered a challenging outlet for upper-class women that, because of the non-waged, volunteer nature of the work and the fact that it took place under male medical supervision, simultaneously reaffirmed conservative gender roles and values.²⁷⁹ The promotion of a 'non-political' caring work as women's ideal contribution reflected the broader opposition of many conservative women's groups to suffrage and other concerns of the women's movement.²⁸⁰ In important ways, then, nursing involved a conservative response to changing gender relations and the rise of liberal, radical, and socialist feminisms.

In the pre-War period nursing developed especially in relation to German imperial projects. Through influential Patriotic Women's Leagues nurses played an important role in sustaining military and settler activity during the German colonial period, even though they were often treated with suspicion by male settlers and colonial officials.²⁸¹ During the War, and in conjunction with the broader integration of the BdF and the women's movement in the war effort, opportunities for nurses expanded significantly. Bourgeois and conservative women's organisations worked with the Red Cross to mobilise and organise around 92,000 nurses for service in the War.²⁸² The Patriotic Women's Leagues argued in a call on 2 August 1914 that men had stepped up to defend crown and fatherland, and that '[t]he Fatherland expects the same devotion and the same willingness to sacrifice from Germany's women and girls as from its sons . . . God grant our flag victory, and bless our work in the service of the Red Cross!'²⁸³ The Leagues also played a key public role in mobilising support for war through public performances of medical interventions and through large-scale poster campaigns that became central to the propaganda efforts of the German state. This propagandistic function in particular began to fail over the course of the War, however, mirroring the broader delegitimisation of the state and older élites.²⁸⁴

²⁷⁸ Wildenthal 2001, p. 15.

²⁷⁹ Quataert 2000, pp. 460–64.

²⁸⁰ Planert 1998, pp. 177–240; Süchting-Hänger 2002.

²⁸¹ Wildenthal 2001, pp. 13–53.

²⁸² Schulte 1997, p. 123. They made up around 40 percent of the total medical personnel deployed in the war.

²⁸³ Quoted in Süchting-Hänger 2002, p. 90.

²⁸⁴ Quataert 2000, pp. 464–74.

Despite their staunch nationalism and conservatism, nurses remained ambivalent figures. They did not overtly challenge patriarchal structures, but their participation at the front nevertheless challenged gendered expectations. For anti-feminist critics this went too far. Not surprisingly, opposition was frequently expressed by sexualising women's involvement at the front, with nurses accused in many cases of simply wanting to find husbands or lovers. More sensationally, the *Berliner Zeitung* ran a story about prostitutes disguised as nurses who were arrested by police, highlighting the unstable boundaries of the category 'prostitute' and its importance in formal and informal modes of regulation of all of women's public roles.²⁸⁵ Resistance to women's service at the front was strengthened by the entry of other women, often lower-middle-class in this case, into auxiliary service in areas behind the lines. These new workers provided much fodder for public discussion of morality; again their public role was frequently configured in terms of the transgression of sexual norms and limits, and at the extreme elided with prostitution.²⁸⁶

Nurses thus simultaneously troubled and sustained dominant gendered practices. For the misogynist and anti-feminist radical right, *any* such feminine intrusion into male social and bodily space, especially militarised space, represented a threat. This is evident in Jünger's response to the hospital ward mentioned above. Death, as we saw, offers the possibility of transcendence, but bodily wounding and his treatment by women unmans him. As Jean Quataert argues, nurses thus represent an older form of conservatism opposed by the radical right: 'women's sacrifices and the values of Christian neighborliness – once integral to official nationalist messages – were alien to the discourses of the new political right'.²⁸⁷ The radical right's response was a violent rhetorical onslaught against unruly women that could easily turn into actual violence. This was especially the case with the figure of the 'red nurse', the communist woman who, as Theweleit argues, figured as a prominent threat in the fantasies of the radical right, and who was visited with sexualised violence in many of their accounts. The opposing image of the 'white nurse', though, also played

285 Schönberger 2002, p. 93.

286 While nurses volunteered or received low pay, their work enabled by their own financial resources, women's auxiliaries received a relatively significant income. The independence this provided compounded the threat they posed to the gendered order (see Schönberger 2002, pp. 95–97). The debates and anxieties over women's auxiliaries were arguably a precursor to those of the Weimar period over the 'new woman' and the emergence of an extensive feminised white-collar workforce, to which I will return in chapter 4.

287 Quataert 2000, p. 483.

a role in sustaining misogynist violence. They were to be protected by radical right fighters, but again it was the threat of rape, this time purportedly by communists, that underlay their place in the radical right imaginary. In Theweleit's view, then, while white nurses were in need of protection, the obsession with sexual violence in these images simultaneously 'may then function as a means of maintaining the threat of rape as an ever-present possibility' for all women.²⁸⁸

This violently misogynist fear and loathing thus sought the elimination of any feminine dispersion and formlessness, an orientation that can be traced to a conception of masculine identity as struggle whose most notable exponent was the Viennese writer Otto Weininger. His 1903 work *Sex and Character* was extremely influential, condensing in virulent terms the broader misogynist, homophobic, and racist (especially anti-Semitic) perspectives characteristic of early twentieth-century ideas of degeneration.²⁸⁹ The book is a massive interdisciplinary work that seeks to ground human life in its social, cultural and biological bases in fundamental gendered and racialised dichotomies. Men and women, he argues, exist on a continuum between two ideal types, a gender continuum that finds its racial parallel between the poles of Aryan and Jew. Everyone falls between the poles, embodying elements of both genders and races. Sexuality is central to his argument, with 'excessive' femininity in men denoting homosexuality, and masculinity in women, lesbianism. Weininger nevertheless simultaneously speaks of 'women' or 'Jews'; while we are all compound beings, women and Jews are tied to their biological nature, incapable of attaining full personhood and the ideal of genius.²⁹⁰

Weininger's work thus expresses a profoundly unstable conception of masculine and Aryan subjectivity and embodiment. This true subjectivity is undermined by femininity. Femininity is in fact not subjectivity at all: '[w]oman wants man sexually, because it is only through his sexuality that she can gain an existence'.²⁹¹ The dynamic here reflects a particular orientation to conceptions of degeneration outlined in the introduction, femininity configured as a threat of negation and formlessness, that was also evident in the logic of the two fronts and the responses of the radical right. The genius of the masculine and Aryan is thus paradoxical; it comes out of the awareness of the feminine

288 Theweleit 1987, p. 100.

289 Weininger 2005. That Weininger himself was both Jewish and homosexual has been at the centre of much of the debates over the nature and significance of his work. For a variety of perspectives on Weininger, see Harrowitz and Hyams 1995.

290 Weininger 2005, pp. 91–100.

291 Weininger 2005, p. 304.

and Jewish element within. However, this awareness takes the form of struggle. Given that women's existence is only enabled by men's sexuality, men need to reject sexual intercourse entirely: 'what is needed is *neither the affirmation nor the denial* of femininity, but its *rejection* and its *conquest*'.²⁹² That the fulfilment of this struggle would lead to the end of humanity is of no consequence; this is the struggle that must be waged.

Weininger's work was an important contribution to the anti-feminism that, as I touched on earlier, gained significant momentum around the turn of the century.²⁹³ The logic expressed in Weininger's argument resonated strongly with that of the radical right. As Theweleit argues, Freudian notions of repression are inadequate to an understanding of radical right subject formation. The radical right subject seeks not repression, but violent struggle and expulsion, the externalisation and obliteration of any traces of femininity. It is this struggle that grounds the radical right male subject.²⁹⁴ The rejection of femininity was reflected as well in popular dreams of a male community (*Männerbund*) that had a broad reach.²⁹⁵ Even more broadly, it is important to remember, these desires were by no means the exclusive province of the radical right, with Weininger in particular proving popular with a wide range of people. As Raymond Williams argues, something like this tendency existed in leftist modernist and avant-garde critiques of bourgeois society and morality as well: 'there is a position within the apparent critique of the bourgeois family which is actually a critique and rejection of all social forms of human reproduction', a rejection that he argues takes the form of an extreme misogyny.²⁹⁶ These continuities and their implications will be explored in greater detail in later chapters.

For the radical right, this violent misogyny was bound up with the counter-revolutionary violence exemplified by the *Freikorps*; both were fights to shore up unstable and porous borders, with the individual body mapping seamlessly onto the social body. Thus, the *Freikorps* Major Josef Bischoff argued that the fighting in the Baltics was a 'last battlefield' against Bolshevism that brought

292 Weininger 2005, p. 308.

293 Weininger's anti-feminism is highlighted in Sengoopta (2000), who also provides a detailed account of the many resonances of Weininger's work in turn of the century science, politics, and culture. On anti-feminism in pre-War Germany, see Planert 1998.

294 This is the concern especially of the second volume of Theweleit's *Male Fantasies* (1989).

295 Heither 2000, pp. 147–71.

296 Williams 1989, p. 57.

together 'those like myself who think of an overcoming of the revolution'.²⁹⁷ This was not a nostalgic desire that sought to preserve a pre-existing nation, however, but a struggle for a new order. As Joan Campbell argues, the War gave a strong boost to ideas of efficiency, rationalisation, and scientific management, generating in the process a strong romantic backlash.²⁹⁸ Jünger's state of total mobilisation, however, did not partake of such romanticism, representing instead a radicalisation of modernist ideas, a violently masculinised fetishisation and celebration of a rationalised social order.

The radical right thus played a fundamental role not only in the counter-revolution, but also in generating a cultural logic that, while it was harnessed in some ways by the SPD, older élites, and capital, also developed its own autonomous dynamic. It was in this sense that the radical right described here enabled the subsequent rise of Nazism. However, their politics remained distinct, a point made by Ernst Bloch in differentiating those like Spengler from the Nazis.

If Spengler predicted the fascist period, he was still wrong to see it starting out coldly, mechanically, from the civilized cosmopolitan cities, in short, from a totally wakeful and late consciousness. But with our fascists Munich, not Berlin, started it, the 'most organic' capital city, not the mechanized one, and the violence emanates from the 'people' (in the highly undemocratic sense), from butcher's dances and the crudest folklore.²⁹⁹

This distinction is important to keep in mind, with the two approaches also representing different moments in the gendered class struggles that shaped the Weimar period. The cold and élite nature of Jünger and others on the radical right emerged not only out of the experience of war, but also out of the paramilitary counter-revolutionary warfare of the post-War period. Theirs was not a mass mobilisation, but the formation of a disciplined and deadly fighting force that, through an extreme misogyny that also had women's struggles

297 Quoted in Sauer 1995, p. 877 from Bischoff's 1935 memoir. Another example was an appeal signed by the *Freikorps* leaders entitled 'To the German fatherland and the civilized peoples [*Kulturvölker*] of the world' that argued the fight against a degenerate Bolshevism was a duty to Germany and to the world (Sauer 1995, p. 891); the call echoes the manifesto of the 93 intellectuals discussed earlier.

298 Campbell 1989, pp. 107–30.

299 Bloch 1990, p. 57.

during the War as a target, could challenge and defeat the revolutionary left. They were repelled in many respects by the folklore and butcher's dances of the Nazis, including by their crude biological racism, but in the early Weimar years the Nazis remained a relatively minor force. In the context of the later Weimar years, the Nazi mass movement took on much greater prominence, a development that forms the context for the final chapter. In turning to the post-War revolutionary movements in the next chapter, though, it is the radical right of the *Freikorps* that provides the background for understanding the dynamics of those early Weimar years.

Revolution: Aesthetics, Politics, and the Question of Totality

3.1 Introduction

Writing in his diary in September 1911 the Expressionist poet Georg Heym proclaimed:

My God – I am going to suffocate with my unutilized enthusiasm in these banal times. For I need forceful emotions in order to be happy. In my dreams, I see myself always as a Danton, or as a man on the barricades; I cannot conceive of myself any longer without a Jacobin cap. Now I hoped at least for a war. That too comes to nothing.¹

Heym himself did not live to see the War that came three years later, nor the revolutions that followed. However, his sense of longing was shared by many of his fellow artists and writers. As we saw in various instances in the previous chapter, the experience of August 1914 provided hope for many of the possibility of radical change, with war a medium for the transcendence of the mundane experiences of everyday life. Walter Benjamin argues that Heym's work displays the beginnings of a longing for 'the then inconceivable constitution of the masses that came into the open in August 1914'.² For many, and often as a result of their experience at the front, this nostalgic desire to find an integrated social order in war quickly faded. Yet the desire continued to animate the culture of the period that followed in many different forms. Frequently, the idea of a political revolution against the War and the existing order replaced their earlier belief in the regenerative power of war. Expressionist artists and writers were especially prone to this metamorphosis. Some turned to the right, following the more famous example of Marinetti and the Italian futurists, but it was the left that more commonly attracted these artistic radicals. Social democrats and communists were often suspicious of these artists, however, with the relationship between artistic and political radicalism remaining fraught and complex.

1 Quoted in Weissenberger 2005, p. 203.

2 'Left-Wing Melancholy', in Benjamin 1999b, p. 425.

Right-wing authors like Ernst Jünger followed a somewhat different trajectory, never losing the sense of war as a transformative project with both political and aesthetic implications. This was evident in his novel *Copse 125*, where Jünger describes the transformations wrought by war on the landscape by way of analogy with aesthetic practices: '[n]ow, however, all that [the old natural beauty] is erased like the delicate evanescence of pastel, and a stylus of steel has been drawn across the land'.³ A number of interconnected themes run through this passage. First, we have a shift in modes of artistic representation, the older pastels of traditional landscapes replaced by a modern(ist) stylus of steel. Implicit in this description is the transformation of nature through industrial and technological processes that, as we saw in the previous chapter, was central to his aesthetics and politics. Second, the language of steel needs to be read in relation to Jünger's embodied politics. The stylus of steel, the agent of this rewriting, is the soldier-male, the bearer of the new technological order. The feminine associations of pastels and natural landscapes underscore the gendered transformation wrought by the hard bodies of his front heroes. What is crucial to this image is that it highlights the deep intersections between aesthetics, politics, and the body. Indeed, this chapter will argue, these intersections profoundly shaped the culture of the period as a whole. Battles taking place on the streets between revolutionary fighters and those of the *Freikorps* cannot be understood without an attention to the realms of aesthetics and embodiment. The hard nostalgic unities of radical-right bodies were all too often replicated on the left, but there too we can find challenges to these dominant aesthetic and embodied practices. In this chapter, then, I will focus on those left mobilisations and the alternative aesthetic, political, and embodied projects that they sought to elaborate.

The aesthetic dimensions of revolution were especially evident in the case of the many artists drawn to socialism, communism, and other left-revolutionary movements during the post-War period. Often this took the form of a romantic anti-capitalism, at times Marxist, at others anarchist. One of the most notable examples of this tendency was Ernst Toller, an Expressionist playwright to whom I will return at various points in this chapter. Toller participated directly in the post-War revolutions, playing a leading role in the Munich Soviet of 1919 before being sentenced to several years in prison. As I will also discuss later, Munich was the site of one of the sustained attempts to establish a council republic and a socialist state in Germany, with the left suffering brutal repression in its aftermath. More than anywhere, artists and cultural radicals played a central role in Munich. For Toller and for others, as we shall see, aesthetic

3 Jünger 1930a, p. 30.

and political radicalism were inseparable; artistic production was a privileged medium for individual and social transformation.

As many communists and other political radicals at the time pointed out, Toller and his cohort shared a utopian conception of individual and social transformation that lacked a concrete class analysis. Their work expressed a naïve nostalgic desire for unity that had earlier been evident in the belief in the transformative power of war. While this critique was true in many respects, I will argue that in this often naïve politics we can also find something missing on much of the left, a sustained and subtle challenge to the dream of unity expressed in the metallic bodies of the radical-right male warrior, and an awareness that the left needed a politics that included a sustained critique of repressive practices of embodiment and subjectivity. The revolutionary vision put forward by Toller and others stressed an emancipation of the body expressed in aesthetic and political terms. Certainly these visions often included a troubling fascination with the bodies 'of suicides, of prisoners, of the sick, of sailors, of the insane,' as Benjamin notes of Heym's work.⁴ But, I will argue in this chapter, the work of the cultural left, including Expressionism, Dada, and other movements, needs to be taken seriously in working through the dynamics of the early Weimar years. In their work we can find emancipatory alternatives to dominant ideas of the *Volkskörper*, including those of the radical right whose shock troops were so central to the counter-revolution.

These competing conceptions of aesthetics, politics, and the body were responses not only to the War and its aftermath, but represented attempts to critically engage with the contradictions of capitalist modernity. Often, as I have suggested, this entailed nostalgic visions of bodily unity, ranging from the radical right's metallic bodies inscribed with a stylus of steel to the cultural left's transformed bodies that I will discuss in this chapter. For Jünger, as we saw in the previous chapter, these bodies were a product of modernity conceived of as crisis and danger. Indeed, as I argued in the introduction to the book, this sense of modernity as crisis ran through the culture of the period as a whole, prompting these nostalgic responses. For Marxists, this crisis was a function of the contradictions structuring capitalist society. It was on this basis that they, and especially those in the newly formed KPD, rejected many of the romantic alternatives offered by those, like Toller, who focused on individual transformation. But, I will argue that their response in turn was often inadequate when we consider the aesthetic and embodied dimensions of capitalist crisis.

The implications of these different conceptions of capitalism and modernity, which I will argue turned on a dialectic of nostalgia and shock, can be

4 'Left-Wing Melancholy', in Benjamin 1999b, p. 425.

seen more clearly by stepping back and looking at German sociological thought of the period, particularly the development of the now familiar sociological distinction between traditional (*Gemeinschaft*) and modern society (*Gesellschaft*). Often implying a critical perspective on modern atomisation, fragmentation, and artificiality, the dichotomy grounded a range of political positions. For Ferdinand Tönnies, one of its early exponents, it entailed a (mild) critique of capitalist rationality written through a narrative of loss, with Tönnies himself joining the SPD in 1930 in response to the rise of the Nazis.⁵ At the same time, the Nazis themselves, of course, invoked such a pre-modern community as well.⁶ The heterogeneity of this nostalgic perspective was evident in the fact that Tönnies' 1887 book *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*, as Harry Liebersohn has noted, gained its greatest popularity in Germany in the 1920s with the same audiences that found Spengler compelling.⁷

The reading of modern, urban life in terms of danger or shock that we saw with Jünger and the radical right received its most extended theorisation in the work of Georg Simmel. For Simmel, metropolitan experience was characterised by shock, the speed and transience of the urban landscape transforming the perceptual faculties and subjectivities of urban dwellers themselves. These residents, Simmel argued in his 1903 essay 'The Metropolis and Mental Life', develop a 'protective organ'⁸ that enables them to absorb shock and sustain an urban existence bereft of the organic unity of traditional society. This gives rise, he says, to a 'blasé metropolitan outlook' characteristic of urban populations.⁹ The influence of Simmel's analysis can be found in the work of, among others, Walter Benjamin, Georg Lukács, Siegfried Kracauer, and Ernst Bloch. They were close to Simmel, but each in their own way integrated a Marxist analysis of capitalism into their engagement with modernity, fragmentation, and the question of totality. The latter term is most often associated with Lukács who,

5 Tönnies 2001.

6 The debates over the extent to which the Nazi movement was 'modern' or an atavistic return of older prejudices are beyond the scope of this book. However, the argument I develop in this chapter suggests that the tradition/modern dichotomy is itself a product of capitalist modernity, thus implying that the debate begins from a faulty premise. Such a dialectical reading of the logic of Nazism came already in Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (2002; see also Horkheimer 1947). As a number of scholars have argued, the Holocaust itself, often read as the most extreme example of the eruption of the pre-modern in Nazi Germany, needs to be understood in terms of modern science and bureaucratic logic (see Bauman 1989; Peukert 1993).

7 Liebersohn 1988, pp. 11–13.

8 'The Metropolis and Mental Life', in Simmel 1971, p. 326.

9 'The Metropolis and Mental Life', in Simmel 1971, p. 329.

Liebersohn argues, produced a Marxist synthesis of Tönnies' nostalgia and Simmel's theorisation of modernity as shock.¹⁰

Nostalgia and shock can thus be read as a dialectical pair structuring a host of responses to capitalist modernity. The radical right armoured body is in this sense a version of nostalgic unity, even though it is grounded in modern technology rather than a past wholeness. As with that radical right body, however, the notion of shock deployed in sociological theory also needs to be read in relation to ideas of degeneration, a perspective neglected in much scholarship. As we saw in the introduction, for Max Nordau modern life (and modernist art) produce physiological and psychological strain that 'involve an effort of the nervous system and a wearing of tissue', and that lead in turn to a range of nervous disorders.¹¹ These modern shocks were exacerbated by war; indeed, the diagnosis of 'shell shock' came out of the First World War and, as I will discuss in the next chapter, involved a treatment and regulation of bodies that counterposed a nostalgic unity of a 'whole' normative body to that of the degenerate. These conceptions strongly influenced the development of sociological readings of modernity, bringing them firmly into the realm of the *Volkskörper*.

In Marxist theory, including the work of those influenced by Simmel, it was capitalism rather than a generic modernity that produced the experience of fragmentation. As I argued in the introduction to the book, Marxist notions of alienation expressed the structured fragmentation characteristic of capitalist social relations, and it was these themes of alienation and reification that became central to the work of Weimar-era Marxist theorists like Benjamin and Lukács. The theoretical horizon for understanding this fragmentation was a conception of capitalism as a totality. These Marxist debates over fragmentation and totality form the theoretical background to this chapter, opening up critical perspectives on the aesthetic, political, and bodily contestations that shaped the Weimar period. As I argued in the introduction, these connections were there in Marx's own work, but Weimar-era Marxist theorists such as Benjamin and Lukács provided new critical approaches that turned on a dialectical conception of nostalgia and shock. These perspectives, I will contend, theorised capitalist modernity as an aesthetico-political unity in which material bodies played a central role. Read in the context of Weimar history, in particular in relation to histories of degeneration and social hygiene, their work takes on new meanings, even as we need to develop a critical analysis of

10 Liebersohn 1988. I will develop a somewhat different reading of Lukács's work later in the chapter, one that stresses more strongly his rejection of Simmel's arguments.

11 Nordau 1993, p. 39.

their often inadequate attention to the ways in which relations of gender, race, sexuality, or ability, as well as class, inflected their cultural politics of the body.

I therefore begin this chapter with the dialectic of nostalgia and shock, looking especially at how Benjamin develops an innovative Marxist approach to the relationships between aesthetics, politics, and embodiment. The second and third sections of the chapter develop these theoretical considerations through an extensive discussion of aesthetics and politics in the early Weimar period. The first of these sections looks at the post-War revolutionary movements, specifically in Munich, and the ways in which political and artistic radicalisms shaped the trajectory of these years. The establishment of a council republic in the city represented one of the most prominent examples of anarchist and communist mobilisation, but was also somewhat of an atypical case in that, as I noted earlier, radical politics in Munich was driven in many ways by artists and writers. It thus provides a very interesting case study of emerging debates over aesthetics and politics on the left.

Building on this discussion of political developments, the next section turns more generally to a consideration of modernist and avant-garde art in the context of the early Weimar years. Taking off from the example of Munich, I look at Expressionism and the emergence of Dada for clues to the nature of the changing configurations of art and politics in the context of the War and its aftermath. Throughout these discussions, the centrality of the body to these political and artistic movements is highlighted. This chapter concludes by returning to the theoretical argument begun in the first section, and engaging with the idea of totality central to Marxist theorising in the period. The idea of totality, I argue, was at once political, aesthetic, and embodied. Yet, as I will show, the left was rarely able to produce an adequate dialectical conception of totality that encompassed a materialist reading of the body; this was most notably the case in Lukács's work. Returning to Benjamin as well as Ernst Bloch and others, I tease out resources for such a critical project, and set the stage in the process for the more concrete discussions of figures of the body taken up in the fourth chapter.

3.2 Nostalgia and Shock

In 1930 Walter Benjamin wrote a review of *War and Warriors*, a book edited by Ernst Jünger that included his essay on total mobilisation. Entitled 'Theories of German Fascism', Benjamin's review critiqued the radical right's positing of the battlefield as new nature in which 'the surroundings had become the terrain of German Idealism; every shell crater had become a problem, every

wire entanglement an antinomy, every barb a definition, every explosion a thesis; by day the sky was the cosmic interior of the steel helmet, and at night the moral law above'. The radical right, he went on, sought to create a new nationalism out of the experience of war, 'an attempt to redeem, mystically and without mediation, the secret of nature, understood idealistically, through technology'.¹² Redemption was central to Benjamin's own aesthetics and politics, but what was on offer here was redemption through violence, a mysticism that sought a nostalgic wholeness through the unmediated totality of the front.

Benjamin himself had been profoundly affected by the experience of war. He began his writing career on the eve of the War and remained deeply concerned throughout his life with the complex aesthetic and political implications of militarised violence; his theorisation of fascist violence in the powerful conclusion to his essay on 'The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility' is but the most famous of these meditations. His was not a pacifist critique of violence, however, nor a liberal or social-democratic reformism that saw the state as a means for a reduction of violence. Rather, as Benjamin argued in his 1921 essay 'Critique of Violence', pacifism and reformism sustained existing practices of violence and the legal bases on which they were enacted. Law itself, he contended, was grounded in and sustained by violence. Military violence, and particularly the mobilisation of the entire population through conscription, was a 'law-preserving' violence.¹³ Writing against the reformist stance of the SPD in the post-War period, Benjamin argued that the call for 'non-violence', for a parliamentarist resolution, was pernicious. The SPD presented a 'familiar, woeful spectacle because they have not remained conscious of the revolutionary forces to which they owe their existence'.¹⁴ Violence was endemic to reformist means/ends calculations, evident also in trade union strikes, which engaged in a kind of extortion. Only the revolutionary general strike, he argued, could expose the contradictory founding role of violence for the state and law, a divine violence that opened up the possibility for transcending the state and violence itself.¹⁵

Benjamin's interest in the radical right was grounded in his awareness of the acute challenge it posed to the left, arguing that the reformism of the SPD was

12 'Theories of German Fascism', in Benjamin 1999b, pp. 318–19.

13 'Critique of Violence', in Benjamin 1978, pp. 284–85.

14 'Critique of Violence', in Benjamin 1978, p. 288.

15 Language, Benjamin argues, is the one sphere in which violence is held in abeyance by offering the possibility of a pure language that expresses the possibility of a reconciled state. The revolutionary general strike likewise opens a window onto this sphere of radical non-violence ('Critique of Violence', in Benjamin 1978 p. 289).

wholly inadequate as a response. Especially as Benjamin developed his reading of Marx and Marxist theory over the course of the 1920s, he came to see the challenges of the post-War period in the context of a broader analysis of the dynamics of capitalist modernity. Thus, his evocation of war in his 1933 essay 'Experience and Poverty' read it as a moment in a larger history. 'A generation that had gone to school in horse-drawn streetcars now stood in the open air, amid a landscape in which nothing was the same except the clouds and, at its center, in a force field of destructive torrents and explosions, the tiny, fragile human body'.¹⁶ We can here recognise the same transformed landscape that we saw in Jünger's work, but the body in Benjamin's account is dramatically different; rather than the armoured body of the soldier-male, we have the tiny, fragile human body. This body offers little purchase for a romantic or redemptive nostalgia. For all the harrowing descriptions of war provided by Jünger, he gives us nothing approaching the radical desolation of this figure, stripped bare by the violence of militarised capitalism.

For Benjamin the denuded landscape of the front is emblematic of the dynamics of shock and the destabilising impact of capitalist social relations. Benjamin develops his analysis of shock most explicitly in his later work, in particular the essays 'The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire' (1938) and 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire' (1939). In two slightly earlier works, though, the 1936 essays 'The Storyteller' and 'The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility',¹⁷ his dialectical conception of nostalgia and shock emerges most clearly.¹⁸ These latter two works offer a performative critique, deploying tropes of nostalgia and shock strategically and seeking to produce a revolutionary writing that could open up the space for critique. The danger, for Benjamin, was that critique could so easily be reabsorbed, turned into a rhetorical flourish for SPD reformism or reabsorbed into the cultural logic of capital. Critique needed to remain fundamentally *unstable*.

This approach is especially evident in 'The Storyteller', which laments the loss of storytelling as a form of cultural practice and social being. The essay is ostensibly about the Russian author Nikolai Leskov, but Benjamin uses his work

16 'Experience and Poverty', in Benjamin 1999b, p. 732.

17 This is a more accurate translation of the title 'Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit' than that by which it initially became known in English, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', published in Benjamin 1968, pp. 217–52.

18 'The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov' [1936] (pp. 83–110) and 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire' (pp. 155–200) are in Benjamin 1968; for 'The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire', see Benjamin 1973a, pp. 9–106.

to ground a broader analysis that takes up the traditional/modern dichotomy of the German sociological tradition. He links storytelling as a social practice directly to artisanal modes of production. It is a form of communication in which the teller, the story, and the listener interpenetrate. Storytelling

does not aim to convey the pure essence of the thing, like information or a report. It sinks the thing into the life of the storyteller, in order to bring it out of him again. Thus traces of the storyteller cling to the story the way the handprints of the potter cling to the clay vessel.¹⁹

The craft of storytelling and listening is characterised by what Benjamin calls 'interpretation', 'which is not concerned with an accurate concatenation of definite events, but with the way these are embedded in the great inscrutable course of the world'.²⁰ This textured and dialogical mode of communication has gradually become 'lost because there is no more weaving and spinning to go on while [storytellers] are being listened to'.²¹ Such an interconnection between modes of production and cultural practices is crucial to Benjamin's argument. In the cultural realm, the shift to an industrial capitalist mode of production was characterised by the rise of the novel, itself enabled by printing. This marked the first stage of the decline of storytelling that culminated in the emergence of the press. As Benjamin had already emphasised in 'One-Way Street' in the mid-1920s, capitalist forms of communication, including the press, leaflets, brochures, articles, and placards, were undermining storytelling and even rendering the 'pretentious' novel obsolete.²²

In Benjamin's account storytelling does not reduce things to their *explanation*, but rather leaves open the process of *interpretation*; new media, in

19 'The Storyteller', in Benjamin 1968, pp. 91–92.

20 'The Storyteller', in Benjamin 1968, p. 96. It was Leskov who likened storytelling to a craft.

21 'The Storyteller', in Benjamin 1968, p. 91. He also links storytelling to settled cultivators, seafaring merchants, and the masters and apprentices of the guild system. Interestingly, in *Wretched of the Earth*, Franz Fanon discusses the centrality of storytelling in the formation of anti-colonial resistance movements, performing a similar dialectical move in recuperating an earlier cultural practice for a contemporary radical project (1963, pp. 240–41).

22 'One-Way Street', in Benjamin 1996, p. 444. He traces the history of the book from the development of the printing press, arguing that its productive life was coming to an end, largely under the influence of advertising and commercial media, a demise foreshadowed by Mallarmé. 'Script – having found, in the book, a refuge in which it can lead an autonomous existence – is pitilessly dragged out into the street by advertisements and subjected to the brutal heteronomies of economic chaos. This is the hard schooling of its new form' (p. 456). The essay was written from 1923–26, but published in 1928.

contrast, simply generate information. 'This is because no event any longer comes to us without already being shot through with explanation. In other words, by now almost nothing that happens benefits storytelling; almost everything benefits information'.²³ Information is commodified, both in the sense that it appears in commercial products like newspapers, and in its very form. As exchange value, fragments of information become interchangeable, their incessant novelty hiding their eternal sameness. Unlike the textured and rooted event of the story, the spread of information renders events themselves interchangeable, a rationalisation more generally characteristic of industrial capitalist production.²⁴ Benjamin's friend Siegfried Kracauer developed a similar argument in his critique of the regressive character of illustrated mass-market magazines in 1927, an argument to which I will return in the fifth chapter. 'Never before has a period known so little about itself', he proclaimed. 'In the hands of the ruling society, the invention of illustrated magazines is one of the most powerful means of organizing a strike against understanding'.²⁵

The shifts to which Benjamin is referring here were precisely those that gave rise to the rationalised projects of information management that we saw in the previous chapter. These shifts, Benjamin argued, were bound up with a transformation in modes of experience. Taking up a theme touched on in 'The Storyteller', Benjamin's essay 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire' identifies two different modes of experience: *Erfahrung* and *Erlebnis*.²⁶ The former corresponds to the dense and textured mode of being of the storyteller, while the latter is characterised by the serialised information of modernity, life experienced as a string of moments entirely abstracted from 'the great inscrutable course of the world'.²⁷ Drawing on Freud, Bergson, and Proust in addition to Baudelaire,

23 'The Storyteller', in Benjamin 1968, p. 89. In 'One Way Street' Benjamin ties this to the dominance of money as a force shaping social life, arguing that '[t]he freedom of conversation is being lost. If, earlier, it was a matter of course in conversation to take interest in one's interlocutor, now this is replaced by inquiry into the cost of his shoes or of his umbrella' (in Benjamin 1996, p. 453). Here his approach remains more under the influence of Simmel, shifting only later to his more Marxist interpretation foregrounding modes of production, as well as commodity relations rather than strictly money. The quote comes from the section 'Imperial Panorama. A Tour Through the German Inflation'.

24 In his 1923 essay 'The Task of the Translator' Benjamin had thus argued that significant literature touches the realm of 'pure language' rather than that of information (in Benjamin 1968, p. 81). This pure language marks a transcendent moment is being lost, although in 1923 he was not yet tying this directly to the commodity form.

25 'Photography', in Kracauer 1995, p. 58.

26 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire', in Benjamin 1968.

27 'The Storyteller', in Benjamin 1968, p. 96.

Benjamin argues that modern *Erlebnis* is characterised by constant change and disruption, by the experience of and response to shock. Here he draws in part on Simmel as well who, as was shown earlier, argued that modern life necessitates the construction of defence mechanisms (a 'protective organ') to enable their absorption. Benjamin had identified this characteristic of modern life already in his earliest publication from just before the War. Entitled 'Erfahrung', it reflected his participation in the pre-war youth movements, and argued that adult life layered a kind of deadening experience over the significant 'inexperiencable' values that youth served.²⁸ While here he was arguing for youth as the repository of true experience (*Erfahrung*), his later work eschewed this romantic longing. Notably, and unlike so many others in 1914, he rejected the War as a medium for the actualisation of experience, turning instead, as David McNally argues, to a notion of the messianic.²⁹

The defence mechanisms built up against shock are both psychic and social. In the Baudelaire essay Benjamin locates the sources of shock in the social relations of urban experience (the crowd), industrial production, and new information technologies, especially film and the press.

In a film, perception in the form of shocks was established as a formal principle. That which determines the rhythm of production on a conveyor belt is the basis of the rhythm of reception in the film . . . the shock experience which the passer-by has in the crowd corresponds to what the worker 'experiences' at his machine.³⁰

Shock here is thus constitutive of the capitalist mode of production and forms of capitalist culture. The historical shift at work here was identified in 'The Work of Art' essay. Pre-capitalist (European) art was, he argues, characterised by its auratic quality, a function of its ritual status that determined 'its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be'.³¹

In both this notion of the aura and in the evocation of storytelling there is a seemingly profound nostalgic moment, one reminiscent of the sociological desire for an organic 'traditional' order destroyed by the modern. In Benjamin's work, though, this nostalgic moment is deployed strategically. In the first instance the ritual of auratic art cannot be read as static tradition; ritual 'itself

28 'Experience', in Benjamin 1996, pp. 3–5, published pseudonymously in *Der Anfang* in 1913–14.

29 McNally 2001, pp. 166–68.

30 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire', in Benjamin 1968, pp. 175–76. On experience, see p. 163.

31 'Work of Art', in Benjamin 1968, p. 220.

is thoroughly alive and extremely changeable'.³² Auratic art also implies a hierarchical social order, a dimension that Benjamin rejects. Tellingly, then, in 'The Work of Art' we find perspectives that seem profoundly at odds with the nostalgia of 'The Storyteller'. Indeed, in 'The Work of Art' Benjamin seems at times to be *celebrating* new forms of cultural production such as film, a point noted by Adorno and subsequently picked up on by many other critics.³³ In that essay destruction of the uniqueness of the auratic object and the shattering of the singularity of the context in which it is received seems to be a progressive moment.

These two processes lead to a tremendous shattering of tradition which is the obverse of the contemporary crisis and renewal of mankind. Both processes are intimately connected with the contemporary mass movements. Their most powerful agent is the film.³⁴

He compares in this respect film and painting, modes of cultural production corresponding to the two modes of experience:

The painter maintains in his work a natural distance from reality, the cameraman penetrates deeply into its web. There is a tremendous difference between the pictures they obtain. That of the painter is a total one, that of the cameraman consists of multiple fragments.³⁵

Modern fragmentation thus produces a loss of a sense of totality.

32 'Work of Art', in Benjamin 1968, p. 223.

33 See Adorno's essay 'On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening' (1982b), written in response to 'The Work of Art'. See also Jameson 1971, pp. 74–6 and Feher 1985, pp. 125–38, who both emphasise the problems of Benjamin's account, the latter (wrongly) going so far as to argue that it is 'one of the most problematic, if not outright reactionary pieces of modern art criticism' (p. 131).

34 'The Work of Art', in Benjamin 1968, p. 221. This takes up from points he made several years earlier in his 1931 essay 'Little History of Photography', in Benjamin 1999b, where he argues that the photographic reproduction of artworks had the most significant impact on the destruction of the aura of the work of art (see pp. 518–23). I will return to Benjamin's work on photography and film in the final two chapters.

35 'The Work of Art' in Benjamin 1968, pp. 233–34; on stage and film, see pp. 228–29. In 'Experience and Poverty' Benjamin ties the loss of aura to new architectural forms, in particular the glass architecture of Paul Scheerbart: 'Objects made of glass have no "aura." Glass is, in general, the enemy of secrets. It is also the enemy of possession' (p. 734).

How then are we to read the seemingly contradictory pulls evident in 'The Storyteller' and 'The Work of Art', with the first suggesting nostalgia for a lost mode of experience, and the second seemingly celebrating new communication technologies? The difficult concept of the aura offers an entry point into these contradictions, suggesting that Benjamin is in fact tracing a series of contradictions constitutive of capitalist modernity. Benjamin emphasises that the loss of the aura and the rise of new media such as film are bound up with broader social changes.³⁶ The breakdown of the aura 'is a symptomatic process whose significance points beyond the realm of art', a significance that 'corresponds to profound changes in the apperceptive apparatus – changes that are experienced on an individual scale by the man in the street in big-city traffic, on a historical scale by every present-day citizen'.³⁷ These different manifestations are not causally connected, but are each expressions of new social relations. Their significance can also only be grasped retrospectively. As Eva Geulen argues, '[t]he aura, as the distinguishing feature of traditional art, becomes visible only to the extent that art has lost this character. The manifestation of the aura arises out of its loss'.³⁸ The loss of aura is thus not to be understood as a teleological process, and certainly not as a marker of progress, but rather is recursively generated. The idea of the aura, in other words, is constituted through the dialectic of nostalgia and shock; it is a product of capitalist modernity. Ideas of 'tradition', organic society, the *Volkskörper*, or the *Volksgemeinschaft*, reify the nostalgic moment by positing it as a moment of plenitude that can (again) be fulfilled. What Benjamin seeks, rather, is shock, but not repetition; nostalgia, but not return.

Benjamin's concerns here are bound up with the problem of totality and the fragment. As indicated earlier, he contrasts the total approach of the auratic painter with the fragments assembled by the cameraman. Benjamin's characterisation of this aesthetic shift arguably comes out of his engagement

36 In the introductory section he puts this in somewhat vulgar Marxist terms: 'The transformation of the superstructure, which takes place far more slowly than that of the substructure, has taken more than half a century to manifest in all areas of culture the change in the conditions of production' ('The Work of Art', in Benjamin 1968, pp. 217–18).

37 'The Work of Art', in Benjamin 1968, pp. 221; 250n19. On film and shock, see also p. 238.

38 Geulen 2002, p. 135. Benjamin's earlier discussion in 'Little History of Photography', which contains a number of themes taken up in 'The Work of Art', tended to ascribe a greater direction and intentionality to the destruction of the aura, arguing for example that the photographer Atget 'initiates the emancipation of object from aura, which is the most signal achievement of the latest school of photography' (in Benjamin 1999b, p. 518).

with Simmel's work and the latter's conception of totality.³⁹ This influence is most evident at the methodological level. In 'The Metropolis and Mental Life' Simmel argued that modern life involves a new kind of integration in which the fragment becomes the emblem of the whole, a social totality in which 'every event, however restricted to this superficial level it may appear [he is discussing pocket watches here], come immediately into contact with the depths of the soul, and that the most banal externalities are, in the last analysis, bound up with the final decisions concerning the meaning and the style of life'.⁴⁰

Simmel developed this approach most systematically in *The Philosophy of Money*, which was constructed through a proliferating series of examples and connections that cannot be reduced to concepts or captured in a theoretical system.⁴¹ His methodology mirrors the surplus of stimulation and shock characteristic of modernity, the often-overwhelming spread of details threatening the assimilative capacity of the reader in much the same way that the metropolitan resident is overwhelmed. This performative methodology works to undermine any attempts to impose a nostalgic or organic unity on the text/world.⁴² It is the deluge itself, the text suggests, that generates the nostalgic impulse, a recursive conception of history that he identifies as a radicalisation of Kant's Copernican revolution.⁴³ Simmel's methodology thus laid the groundwork for a conception of nostalgia understood as constitutive of the modern rather than, as in much of the sociological tradition, an 'outside' to which the modern is counterposed.

What Benjamin took from Simmel's project was the critical destabilisation of the categories of nostalgia and shock, although he argued that Simmel

39 Benjamin's use of Simmel marked one of his points of contention with Adorno. He cited Simmel in the first version of the Baudelaire essay, 'The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire', in Benjamin 1973a, pp. 37–8, but this was removed in response to Adorno's critique (see Adorno's 1938 letter to Benjamin in Bloch et al. 1977, pp. 128–29).

40 'The Metropolis and Mental Life', in Simmel 1971, p. 328.

41 Simmel 1990.

42 Frisby 1986 sees this as the key point at which Simmel, Benjamin, and Kracauer, whom he reads together, differ from the sociological tradition grounded in the tradition/modern dichotomy.

43 Simmel argued in 1905 that in freeing the mind from nature, Kant left it enchained in those of mind as history. His approach sought the liberation from history, a recognition that categories of historical conception and knowledge inhere in the knower: 'Man, as something known, is made by nature and history; but man, as knower, makes nature and history... Mind becomes aware of itself in the stream of becoming, but mind has already marked out the banks and currents of that stream and thereby made it into "history"' ('How is History Possible?' in Simmel 1971, pp. 4–5).

remained wedded to a 'petty-bourgeois-idealist theory of labor' that, as I will discuss in the final section, signals Simmel's inability to theorise the capitalist nature of modernity.⁴⁴ It is this critical nostalgia that Benjamin deploys in 'The Storyteller'. He writes that:

The art of storytelling is reaching its end because the epic side of truth, wisdom, is dying out. This, however, is a process that has been going on for a long time. And nothing would be more fatuous than to want to see in it merely a 'symptom of decay', let alone a 'modern' symptom. It is, rather, only a concomitant symptom of the secular productive forces of history, a concomitant that has quite gradually removed narrative from the realm of living speech and at the same time is making it possible to see a new beauty in what is vanishing.⁴⁵

In this passage, Benjamin powerfully emphasises the anti-nostalgia of his nostalgia. It is not *loss* that animates 'The Storyteller', but rather (and this is the key phrase) it is in the irrevocable vanishing that a *new* beauty flashes up. This is the retrospective moment highlighted by Geulen, and is precisely the critical, dialectical moment in Benjamin's deployment of nostalgia and shock, the point at which present and past interpenetrate in a way that precludes their methodological or political separation.⁴⁶ Indeed, it is impossible to distinguish the methodological from the political in Benjamin's work, which seeks to produce the space within which revolution can be thought.

Fredric Jameson's influential reading captures important aspects of Benjamin's idea of nostalgia, even while missing the full import of his work. Jameson argues that 'there is no reason why a nostalgia conscious of itself, a lucid and remorseless dissatisfaction with the present on the grounds of some remembered plenitude, cannot furnish as adequate a revolutionary stimulus as any other',⁴⁷ but he sees Benjamin's approach as reflecting an 'unresolved, ambiguous attitude toward modern industrial civilization, which seems to

44 Benjamin 1999a, p. 660 (from Konvolut x, 'Marx').

45 'The Storyteller', in Benjamin 1968, p. 87.

46 Schütz reads Benjamin's 'Berlin Childhood around 1900' in a somewhat similar fashion, arguing that the essay develops a non-nostalgic reading of childhood which enables a critical conception of *Heimat* as a labyrinth rather than a 'mother earth' (1996, pp. 77–81). This question of *Heimat* also then links the perspectives I am developing here much more explicitly to discourses of nation and community, and locates Benjamin's work in the specific historical contexts of growing up Jewish in Berlin.

47 Jameson 1971, p. 82.

have fascinated him as much as it depressed him'.⁴⁸ While Jameson correctly highlights the potentially fruitful role of nostalgia for revolutionary praxis, in suggesting that his work is ambiguous he misses the dialectical moment in Benjamin and the extent to which nostalgia is itself a structuring principle of the culture of capitalist modernity.⁴⁹ Benjamin's description of ambiguity is quite different:

Ambiguity is the manifest imaging of dialectic, the law of dialectics at a standstill. This standstill is utopia and the dialectical image, therefore, dream image. Such an image is afforded by the commodity per se: as fetish.⁵⁰

Historical materialism provides Benjamin with his understanding of praxis, the revolutionary moment that unites methodology and politics, breaking the spell of the commodity and, as he often puts it, instigating the moment of waking. Benjamin's dialectical conception of nostalgia and shock entails a transformed, non-linear temporality that is the product of class struggle, a temporal rupture that defines revolution. 'The awareness that they are about to make the continuum of history explode is characteristic of the revolutionary classes at the moment of their action'.⁵¹

Benjamin's conception of the 'dialectical image' is central to his radical-critical project. As he put it in his *Arcades Project*:

It's not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on what is past; rather, image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation. In other words, image is dialectics at a standstill. For while the relation of the present to the past is a purely temporal, continuous one, the relation of

48 Jameson 1971, p. 81.

49 The difficulties in adequately tracing Benjamin's conception of nostalgia are evident too in Boym 2001. In her work on nostalgia, she places Benjamin in 'a tradition of critical reflection on the modern condition that incorporates nostalgia, which I will call *off-modern*' (p. xvi). This 'off-modern' mode is oriented to what she says is a reflective rather than a restorative nostalgia (pp. 41–56). While this 'reflective' nostalgia captures an important dimension of Benjamin's work, it retains a passive orientation that does not do justice to the profoundly activist political core driving Benjamin's work, and especially the historical materialist method around which it is structured.

50 Benjamin, 'Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century' (Exposé of 1935), in Benjamin 1999a, p. 10. The quote is from the section of the essay devoted to 'Baudelaire, or the Streets of Paris'.

51 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', in Benjamin 1968, p. 261.

what-has-been to the now is dialectical: is not progression but image, suddenly emergent. – Only dialectical images are genuine images (that is, not archaic); and the place where one encounters them is language.⁵²

This account highlights the limitations of Jameson's notion of nostalgia as static memory (a 'remembered plenitude'), a mistake that Jürgen Habermas also makes in his reading of Benjamin's historical work as 'rescuing' tradition.⁵³ For Benjamin, notions of memory or rescue reify the past in ways that can only serve to memorialise and reinscribe a progressivist historical narrative. His 'messianic' politics instead entails a leap out of history, a fundamental transformation of temporality itself.⁵⁴ Significantly, in the 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' Benjamin links this dialectical leap to Spartacist practice.⁵⁵

There are two implications that I want to develop out of this discussion of Benjamin that will lay the groundwork for the key themes of this chapter and the rest of the book: the aesthetic dimensions of Benjamin's conception of a revolutionary politics, and the politics of embodiment that structures his account. In terms of aesthetics and politics, Benjamin's 'Work of Art' essay is the key text, with his argument in the epilogue especially famous. There he argues that post-auratic art marks a moment of danger in which '[i]nstead of being based on ritual, it begins to be based on another practice – politics'.⁵⁶ This shift in the function and meaning of art traces the limits of possibility in the context of an emerging fascism in which humanity's

self-alienation has reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order. This is the situation of politics which Fascism is rendering aesthetic. Communism responds by politicizing art.⁵⁷

52 Benjamin 1999a, p. 462 (from Konvolut N, entry N2a, 3).

53 Habermas 1988, p. 101. Habermas's view is sustained by a notion of 'progress' understood as incremental gains (pp. 122–24) that is fundamentally at odds with Benjamin's conception of history and radical politics.

54 Martin Buber occupies an interesting position here as well, looking to a spiritualised, anarchic communal life in the present/future as a response to capitalist modernity. In a 1924 lecture reworking the sociological nostalgia, he argued that '*Gemeinschaft* is a messianic, non-historical category. To the extent that it is historical, its messianic character shows through' (quoted in Löwy 1992, p. 55).

55 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', in Benjamin 1999b, p. 260.

56 'The Work of Art', in Benjamin 1968, p. 224.

57 'The Work of Art', in Benjamin 1968, p. 242. This was, as I discussed in the previous chapter, central to his critique of Jünger and the radical right in 1930s 'Theories of German Fascism' as well.

'The Storyteller' essay, I have argued, with its nostalgic invocation of a radically different mode of experience, is significant precisely because there he uses nostalgia strategically to break the hold of the Fascist aestheticisation of politics, reclaiming nostalgic energy for a communist project.⁵⁸

Benjamin's essays were written in the later 1930s as the Nazis were consolidating power and the international left was responding (wrongly, he thought), with Popular Front politics.⁵⁹ However, Benjamin had already been concerned with the relationship between radical politics and culture in the Weimar period. As Jürgen Habermas suggests, Benjamin's 1929 essay 'Surrealism' is a key text in this respect, although again Habermas's reading offers an inadequate understanding. In the work of the Surrealists, Habermas argues, Benjamin found that 'the separation between poetic and political action had been overcome'.⁶⁰ Habermas contends that the problem with the essay is that Benjamin was unable to adequately theorise the relationship between this radical aesthetic praxis and the demands of political organising. Benjamin realised that '[t]he experience of shock is not an action, and profane illumination is not a revolutionary deed',⁶¹ but, Habermas proposes, he was unable to adequately deal with this realisation.⁶²

Habermas's reading misses the extent to which Benjamin was aware of these problems. Indeed, Benjamin himself ascribed these political limitations to the practice of the Surrealists, suggesting that *they* risked mistaking revolt in the aesthetic realm for social revolution. The Surrealists had a radical conception of freedom (one that Europe had lacked since Bakunin), but Benjamin asks: 'are they successful in welding this experience of freedom to the other revolutionary experience, which we must acknowledge because it has been

58 Beatrice Hanssen, by contrast, tends to read the two essays in opposition, arguing for Benjamin's work more generally that, while not anti-modernist, 'it cannot be doubted that even in the 1930s Benjamin's thought failed to offer a blueprint for the Marxist revolution but instead incessantly returned to that which effectively precedes the political realm – the ethico-theological' (1998, p. 7). She sees this latter tendency especially in essays like 'The Storyteller'. As with Jameson, however, Hanssen's interpretation misses the dialectical character of Benjamin's work.

59 McNally argues that Benjamin's critical view of the Popular Front strategy, which turned the left away from class-based revolutionary politics, is crucial to understanding the political implications of his later work (2001, pp. 216–19).

60 Habermas 1988, p. 119.

61 Habermas 1988, pp. 119–20.

62 Habermas sets himself the task in this essay of developing a more effective understanding of radical politics, although, as my critique here suggests, he begins from a faulty reading of Benjamin. A consideration of his argument is beyond the scope of the discussion here.

ours – the constructive, dictatorial side of revolution? In short, have they bound revolt to revolution?’⁶³ The implication is that they have not. Thus, Benjamin argues, it is not in the Surrealist representations of Paris that we find a subversive potential, but in the realisation generated by those representations that ‘only revolt completely exposes [the city’s] Surrealist face (deserted streets in which whistles and shots dictate the outcome). And no face is surrealistic to the same degree as the true face of a city’.⁶⁴ Both Habermas and Benjamin thus share a sense of the limitations of Surrealism, but for the latter the movement had nevertheless opened up the possibilities for a radically different form of perception.

The problem that Benjamin identifies here – how to bind aesthetic revolt to revolutionary politics – is one that, as we shall see, returned consistently in debates over aesthetics and politics on the left. At the heart of this issue in Benjamin’s work, as with the radical art of the Weimar period, is the problem of embodiment. For Benjamin, the bodily implications of radical art and politics are brought to the fore in the closing passages of his ‘Surrealism’ essay. There he configures his historical materialism in terms of the interpenetration of what he calls ‘image space’ (*Bildraum*) and ‘body space’ (*Leibraum*),

the space, in a word, in which political materialism and physical creatureliness share the inner man, the psyche, the individual, or whatever else we wish to throw to them, with dialectical justice, so that no limb remains untorn. Nevertheless – indeed, precisely after such dialectical annihilation – this will still be an image space and, more concretely, a body space.⁶⁵

63 ‘Surrealism’, in Benjamin 1999b, p. 215. In this respect Adorno gave a somewhat similar account of Surrealism in a later essay. Arguing against understanding Surrealism as an expression of dreams and the subconscious, he contends that ‘[t]he tension in Surrealism that is discharged in shock is the tension between schizophrenia and reification; hence it is specifically not a tension of psychological inspiration. In the face of total reification, which throws it back upon itself and its protest, a subject that has become absolute, that has full control of itself and is free of all consideration of the empirical world, reveals itself to be inanimate, something virtually dead. The dialectical images of Surrealism are images of a dialectic of subjective freedom in a situation of objective unfreedom’ (1991, p. 88). Unlike Adorno, however, Benjamin has a conception of revolutionary politics through which to think out of the Surrealist dilemma.

64 ‘Surrealism’, in Benjamin 1999b, p. 211.

65 ‘Surrealism’, in Benjamin 1999b, p. 217. Henri Lefebvre provided a similar account of Surrealist practice, arguing that ‘[t]he leading surrealists sought to decode inner space

While the connections here are not made directly, Benjamin's argument can be read as a radical reformulation of the *Volkskörper*. The relationship set up in this passage between physical creatureliness and the inner psyche is precisely that at the heart of eugenic and social hygienic practices, the interconnection of body and psyche. For Benjamin, however, it is the torn limb rather than the desire for a wholeness that marks the body and that signifies the political and materialist tenor of his project in this passage. As with the *Volkskörper*, the body- and image-space also brings together the individual and social body: '[t]he collective is a body, too'.⁶⁶ This is not the collective body of the *Volkskörper*, but the revolutionary body of communist praxis. 'Only when in technology body and image space so interpenetrate that all revolutionary tension becomes bodily collective innervation, and all the bodily innervations of the collective become revolutionary discharge, has reality transcended itself to the extent demanded by the *Communist Manifesto*'.⁶⁷ The revolutionary subject potentially produced by Surrealist practice thus bore a new face, one that offered a radical challenge to nostalgic notions of authenticity or individuality. 'They exchange, to a man, the play of human features for the face of an alarm clock that in each minute rings for sixty seconds'.⁶⁸

What Benjamin presents us with here is a radically different conception of the body to challenge the armoured men of the radical right: not a seamless and impenetrable body, but a torn body and a face that signals only the eternal state of emergency that is capitalism. The dialectical moment in Surrealism, then, is in the deployment of decay, of ruin, a concern that would shape his own *Arcades Project*. Breton's and the Surrealists' discovery, he says, was

and illuminate the nature of the transition from the subjective space to the material realm of the body and the outside world, and thence to social life' (1991, p. 18).

66 'Surrealism', in Benjamin 1999b, p. 217.

67 'Surrealism', in Benjamin 1999b, pp. 217–18.

68 'Surrealism', in Benjamin 1999b, p. 218. See Weigel 1996, pp. 3–29 for a discussion of these images in Benjamin. She argues that Benjamin's practice of 'thinking-in-images' is crucial to understanding his approach, which she reads in relation to both Freud and Marx. The end of 'Surrealism', she argues, 'restores matter to its central significance for psychoanalysis and for the means of expression of a language of the unconscious. And conversely: [Benjamin] brings to the reading of Marxism a manner of observation derived from psychoanalysis – which accounts for his emphasis on the expressive relationship (between economics and culture) rather than the causal connection that Marx attempted to delineate, and gives rise to his specific, psychoanalytically based reading of the images of history' (1996, p. 11). This interpretation is valuable, although it relies on a base/superstructure model of Marx which does not capture the extent to which Benjamin is arguably continuing and extending rather than challenging a Marxist project.

‘to perceive the revolutionary energies that appear in the “outmoded” ... No one before these visionaries and augurs perceived how destitution – not only social but architectonic, the poverty of interiors, enslaved and enslaving objects – can be suddenly transformed into revolutionary nihilism’.⁶⁹

This nihilism, the anarchic dimension of Surrealism he links with Bakunin, was not by itself revolutionary. Intoxication, Benjamin argues, the bodily experience of this anarchic energy that one can find in the hashish or opium trance, but also in the romantic surrender to the mystery of the world, needs to be rendered as everyday practice ‘by virtue of a dialectical optic that perceives the everyday as impenetrable, the impenetrable as everyday’.⁷⁰ Here we can see the distinctive nature of Benjamin’s Marxism, for he turns not to the working class, but to those at the margins of capitalist modernity for his inspiration. The everyday is the realm of the reader, the thinker, the loiterer, the rag-picker, and the *flâneur*, the ‘refuse of society’⁷¹ that provides the explosive charge in his work.

Benjamin’s interest in these marginalised figures, who were often derided as the lumpenproletariat by communists, was part of a broader modernist and avant-garde fascination with those located ‘outside’ the bourgeois social order, the suicides, the sick, and the insane that we saw earlier in Heym’s work. While predominantly of bourgeois origin themselves, artists frequently expressed an affinity for these outsiders. Benjamin was particularly attuned to the complex issues raised by this appropriation of the image of the ‘outsider’ in radical culture. He argued that this modernist appropriation was often extremely crude and inadequately attuned to the relational and socially constituted character of marginalisation; this in turn was central to the failure of these radical artists to turn revolt into revolution. One example Benjamin gives is Baudelaire’s deployment of the figure of the lesbian. She is the key figure in Baudelaire, Benjamin argues, ‘the hero of modernism’⁷² who designates the limits of the social order in Baudelaire’s work. While she is the hero, though, Benjamin argues that Baudelaire sees her solely within the framework of modernism, missing in the process the embodied social reality of her emergence.⁷³ Benjamin thus argues that Baudelaire’s lack of political conviction leads to his

69 ‘Surrealism’, in Benjamin 1999b, p. 210.

70 ‘Surrealism’, in Benjamin 1999b, p. 216.

71 ‘Paris of the Second Empire’, in Benjamin 1973a, p. 79.

72 ‘Paris of the Second Empire’, in Benjamin 1973a, p. 90.

73 ‘Paris of the Second Empire’, in Benjamin 1973a, pp. 90–94. Baudelaire’s figure of the lesbian was taken up widely in German modernism, the first issue of the Expressionist journal *Die Aktion*, for example, reprinting his ‘Lesbos’ (see Baudelaire 1911).

aestheticising self-identification with the marginal figures that populate his work, losing the social mediation that is crucial.

Whether Benjamin's alternative is adequate is another question. The 'social reality' of the lesbian that he invokes draws on commonplace social hygienic ideas that understood lesbianism as a result of masculinisation brought on in part by women's growing involvement in factory labour.⁷⁴ Such traces of social hygienic thinking can be found throughout Benjamin's work, although he remains consistently sceptical of approaches that ignore social context. Another example is in the common modernist figure of the 'primitive', embodied for Benjamin by the apache. Along with the lesbian, '[t]he image of the hero here includes the apache ... The apache abjures virtue and laws; he terminates the *contrat social* forever'.⁷⁵ Reflecting its position in body- and image-space, he suggests that this figure simultaneously marks a concrete social location and an aesthetic construct.

The poetry of apachedom appears in an uncertain light. Do the dregs of society supply the heroes of the big city? Or is the hero the poet who fashions his work from such material? The theory of modernism admits both.⁷⁶

Unlike so many modernist and avant-garde artists of the period, Benjamin is therefore not proposing a simple primitivism unaware of its nostalgic desires, even if he does not fully appreciate the colonial and imperial roots of this primitivism.⁷⁷

Even more so than the lesbian or the primitive, Benjamin articulated his theory of capitalist modernity through the figure of the prostitute. As I noted in the last chapter, prostitution was the site of profound anxieties around degeneration that were exacerbated by the experience of the War. Indeed, the figure of the prostitute was ubiquitous in the Weimar period, appearing constantly not only in news stories, films, and other mass media depictions of urban space, but also in modernist and avant-garde art, and in social theory. In terms of the latter field, Simmel's work is especially notable, with Benjamin's writing bearing the traces of Simmel's use of the figure of the prostitute to symbolise

⁷⁴ 'Paris of the Second Empire', in Benjamin 1973a, pp. 90–94.

⁷⁵ 'Paris of the Second Empire', in Benjamin 1973a, pp. 78–79.

⁷⁶ 'Paris of the Second Empire', in Benjamin 1973a, p. 80.

⁷⁷ I will develop a critical reading of modernist primitivism in the next chapter.

money and exchange, and ultimately modernity itself.⁷⁸ In *The Philosophy of Money* Simmel gives a reading of prostitution as expressive of essentialised gendered subjectivities. It is the prostitute *as a woman* who is in danger, a threat that stems from the fact that women 'are more deeply rooted in the species type than are men, who are more greatly differentiated and more specifically individualized'.⁷⁹ Because of this reduction of women to their sexual and reproductive function, prostitution means that women are wholly reduced to money. The dissolving and levelling power of money is thus read onto women, generating a dynamic of feminine dissolution that mirrors that of the logic of degeneration. The relationship between money and women goes beyond prostitution as well. Marriage for money is a problem, a point he makes with reference to its degenerative effects: it 'has absolutely nothing to do with racial appropriateness'.⁸⁰ The solution is marriage for love.⁸¹

Benjamin's reading of the prostitute has some affinities with that of Simmel. In his earliest writings as a student in 1915 Benjamin argued that prostitution was a central problem for youth, part of 'the lamentable division into the intellectual autonomy of the creative spirit (in the fraternities) and an unmastered force of nature (in prostitution) – a distorted and fragmented torso of the one erotic spirit'. Healing this split required love, but a hierarchical love involving 'the necessary inclusion of women, who are not productive in a masculine sense, in a single community of creative persons'.⁸² The prostitute

78 In part through an engagement with Simmel's work, Bernd Widdig links the prominence of the figure of the prostitute in the Weimar period to the destabilising impact of the inflation (2001, pp. 211–15).

79 Simmel 1990, p. 378. Thus, he argues, a rake is not in the same position as a prostitute because he has many other characteristics that differentiate him as an individual.

80 Simmel 1990, p. 381. He also situates this in relation to 'barbaric tribes' in which women seem more like men because those 'primitive' societies are inherently less differentiated (p. 380).

81 It is in relation to prostitution that his gendered construction is most troubling; more generally, his view of women is profoundly ambivalent, with femininity associated more with the organic life that he counterposes to the atomisation of (masculine) modernity (see Felski 1995, pp. 41–49).

82 'The Life of Students', in Benjamin 1996, p. 44. In the fragment 'Socrates' [1916] Benjamin argues that genius requires the feminine as ground or guarantee, a contention that has a Weiningerian tinge, although he vehemently rejects the assertion of male autonomy (in Benjamin 1996, pp. 52–54). Here he was engaging partly with Rickert's lectures on logic which he attended at Freiburg in 1913. While Rickert had a major impact on him, he disagreed with Rickert's contention that women were incapable of the highest moral perfection, although arguing that the nature of that perfection was different (see Broderson 1997, p. 52).

as woman remains here in a naturalised state of subordination. In his later 'One-Way Street' this remains largely the case, with the prostitute appearing as a means to (masculine) creative development in his paralleling of the erotic and economic circulation of books and sex workers.⁸³ In Simmel's work and in Benjamin's earlier writings, then, the prostitute body becomes a nostalgic vehicle for the evocation of a lost natural state in contrast to a fractured modernity.

By the 1930s, in 'Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century', the figure of the prostitute shifts, becoming fully realised in Benjamin's work as an image of capitalism itself. Here we can see a powerful instance in which Benjamin's analysis of capitalist social relations is grounded in an understanding of material bodily practices. In his discussion of dialectics at a standstill, covered above, he argued that the dialectical image

is afforded by the commodity per se: as fetish. Such an image is presented by the arcades, which are house no less than street. Such an image is the prostitute – seller and sold in one.⁸⁴

Again Baudelaire offers a modernist example:

Baudelaire's poetry draws its strength from the rebellious pathos of this class [the *bohème*]. He sides with the asocial. He realizes his only sexual communion with a whore.⁸⁵

Rather than a simple bohemian rebellion, though, Benjamin suggests that it is the prostitute's unmediated embodiment of objectified and alienated capitalist social relations that makes her so emblematic. From his early gendered and utopian caricature, then, he has moved to a much more nuanced and socially grounded account of sex work.

What remains unclear, however, is to what extent the prostitute remains simply a symbol for capitalism, and to what extent Benjamin grasps prostitution as social practice, as labour. Esther Leslie makes the case that Benjamin's use of the figure of the prostitute does not simply involve her reduction to a symbol. Arguing against both postmodern readings of Benjamin that efface his Marxist anti-capitalism, and feminist critiques that see his imagery as

83 'One-Way Street', in Benjamin 1996, pp. 460–61. The section has 13 theses developing the parallel between book and harlot, ending: 'XIII. Books and harlots: footnotes in one are as banknotes in the stockings of the other' (p. 461).

84 'Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century', in Benjamin 1999a, p. 10.

85 'Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century', in Benjamin 1999a, p. 10.

irredeemably contaminated by misogynist tropes, Leslie proposes that Benjamin's gendered imagery is instead integral to his critique of capitalist forms of reification and commodity fetishism, the prostitute in particular embodying the logic of capital. 'If the prostitute is a thing for Benjamin, it is because she is a thing for capital'.⁸⁶ The prostitute embodies the separate spheres of capital, those of production and consumption, this combination marking the source of her abjection and in part explaining why, I would argue, sex work is consistently at the centre of eugenic and social hygienic discourses and practices. In Benjamin's work, Leslie says, the prostitute becomes a dialectical image, an allegory for the contradictions of consumer capitalism:

The political twist of Benjamin's argument is to invest the radical negativity of the commodity-woman with a politically positive charge. Prostitution and denatured femininity are read as social symptoms, a negation that destroys heart-warming ideologies, a move that might eventually lead to the destruction of its conditions of existence, though this effect is not quietistically guaranteed.⁸⁷

Leslie's argument thus implies that Benjamin has gone far beyond Simmel's reductionist reading of the figure of the prostitute. As with his other figures of marginality, the prostitute disrupts the ideological smoothness of capitalist social relations. Yet Leslie does admit that Benjamin 'may be substituting his articulacy for a subjectivity commonly denied voice'.⁸⁸ This is undoubtedly the case, a perspective that necessarily leads him to place an interpretive burden on the figure of the prostitute that it cannot bear. What is also notable is that in the case of the prostitute, Benjamin does not identify himself with her, an identification that he performs much more easily with other figures like the rag-picker and the *flâneur*. Positioning the prostitute as 'radical negativity' reinforces the logic of degenerate exceptionalism, and misses the mundane nature of sex work as labour, a characteristic shared with other forms of waged labour.⁸⁹

86 Leslie 1997, p. 74. See also McNally 2001, pp. 205–11.

87 Leslie 1997, p. 83.

88 Leslie 1997, p. 79. See also Geulen 1996, pp. 161–80, who is more attentive to the ambivalence that this entails, although her work lacks the emphasis on the crucial issues of capitalism that Leslie highlights.

89 In my reading I have also followed the assumption in Benjamin and Simmel that sex work is something intrinsically feminised, performed by women. Considering male sex work in this context would further complicate the gendered politics of the figure of the prostitute.

In the next chapter I will return at greater length to the representation of the prostitute in Weimar culture. In art and in discourses of social hygiene she was depicted most commonly as a shocking figure bearing the degenerative marks of modern life, a key image in the contested politics of the *Volkskörper*. Her aestheticised body circulated promiscuously in the culture of the period, even while the labour of sex workers was being regulated and repressed. Benjamin's deployment of the figure of the prostitute as embodiment of capitalist social relations is thus significant as it moves partially beyond this reductive portrayal, producing a dialectical image rather than a simple nostalgia for the whole body, imbuing her instead, as Leslie argued, with a positive political charge. It is this dialectical moment in his work that, as I have argued, runs through his conception of aesthetics and politics more broadly, and opens up a Marxist reworking of ideas of the *Volkskörper* that engaged in a radical way with the embodied nature of capitalist social relations. Benjamin was not the only one working with such ideas, although, as we shall see, many of those who did were working more in anarchist traditions. The post-War revolutionary movements in Germany were deeply marked by the debates over aesthetics, politics, and practices of embodiment I have framed here, nowhere more so than in the uprisings in Bavaria. There, contestations over artistic and political radicalism were often fought on the terrain of the body. This is the focus of the next section.

3.3 Art, Politics, and Revolution

The problem of the relationship between radical art and radical politics was posed perhaps most insistently in the Weimar period in Munich and Bavaria in 1918–19. As I outlined in the introduction to the book, in the aftermath of the War a range of radical movements fought to overthrow not only the old imperial political order, but also in many cases capitalism itself. The SPD played the role of a brake in this context, seeking to contain more revolutionary currents and implement limited parliamentary and legislative changes. One of the most prominent examples of these post-War contestations took place in Munich, where the revolutionary left enjoyed one of its most significant, if short-lived, victories. Even more than elsewhere, in Munich radical writers and artists played central roles in the development of the revolutionary movement. In part as a result, a wider range of political currents were involved in Munich, with artist-activists in particular tending in anarchist directions that often left them at odds with the communist movement, even while some sought to overcome these divisions in developing hybrid forms of anarcho-socialism. The

distinctive nature of the situation in Munich makes it an especially interesting case study for the consideration of the historical debates over aesthetics, politics, and embodiment that I have been tracing here.

Many of those active in the revolutionary movements sought the abolition of the distinction between art and politics, or art and life, but these perspectives were also targeted by the Bavarian counter-revolution. As I discussed in the book's introduction, theorists of degeneration often portrayed modernism as a particular threat to the health of the social body. Denunciations of revolutionaries in Munich often invoked these themes of degeneration, dwelling as well on the fact that many came out of the bohemian Schwabing district of Munich. Revolutionary leaders were thus condemned as degenerate outsiders challenging the solid virtues of Bavarian society. Right-wing attacks, which often took on anti-Semitic overtones, frequently involved the ascription of medical and psychiatric diagnoses of degeneracy to revolutionary developments. Emil Kraepelin, a prominent psychologist and a key figure in German eugenics and social hygiene, argued that post-War radicalism expressed an 'hysterical mass-psychosis' brought on by the deprivations of war, and that the revolution was being fomented by 'psychopathic leaders'.⁹⁰ In Kraepelin's case his influential institutional position meant that these diagnoses carried significant weight; as we shall see, he was responsible for the psychiatric confinement of more than one radical leader.⁹¹

Significantly, it was not just the right that condemned the bohemian revolutionaries in these terms. Communists also framed the anarchist-oriented developments in Munich using tropes of degeneration. As the KPD leader Paul Frölich suggested, writing in the aftermath of the revolution under the pseudonym P. Werner, many of the artist-leaders had little or no political experience and held political positions rooted in the USPD or anarchism rather than revolutionary socialism. He too derided their bohemian background, calling Erich Mühsam 'an epigone of those coffee house writers . . . who warble cheeky lyrics and sing impudent songs mocking society in an atmosphere of hunger, alcohol, perversity, and megalomania. Bohemia was his element and that meant: he was politically a child'.⁹² Such infantile politics was responsible for the failure of the events in Munich. The KPD considered the Munich Soviet a *Schein-Räterepublik* (a sham council republic) whose precipitous formation was based on an incorrect analysis of working-class consciousness, levels of

90 Quoted in Geyer 1998, p. 99.

91 Geyer 1998. On the association of revolutionaries with Schwabing, see pp. 59–64; on conservative and radical right responses, including those of Kraepelin, see pp. 94–129.

92 Werner 1920, p. 19.

mobilisation, and the national balance of forces.⁹³ As the Spartacist locksmith Hans Kain wrote to the KPD leader Max Levien, the bohemian left of 'a couple of hundred academic intellectual idiots' produced nothing but 'mental masturbation'.⁹⁴

The KPD's analysis was not incorrect – many of the leading figures in Munich were political novices who came out of an anarchist and romantic anti-capitalist tradition that had a limited social base, and whose class analysis was often quite limited. Yet I will argue that this critique also missed important aspects of the critical practice developed by the bohemian radicals. Frölich's own use of tropes of degeneration and his condemnation of them as 'outsiders' highlights the narrowness of the KPD's analysis and their inability to engage with social cleavages beyond class. Indeed, I will argue that the willingness of these 'outsiders' to engage with questions of embodiment and subjectivity that addressed complex forms of marginalisation was not simply a hindrance to a proper revolutionary orientation. Often enough their fetishisation of the outsider and the marginal came with problems, but their radical cultural activism also developed forms of social critique with profoundly emancipatory implications.

I begin this section with an historical overview of the revolutionary movements in Munich that highlights their implications in the complex politics of class, labour, and gender that also informed my reading of protest in the previous chapter. This discussion will provide the context for my subsequent engagement with a number of cultural radicals, including Gustav Landauer, Erich Mühsam, and Ernst Toller. These writers were among the most prominent artist-revolutionaries in the Munich Soviet who, especially in the case of Mühsam and Toller, sought to produce an emancipatory politics attuned to the repressive nature of practices of eugenics and social hygiene. Toller's play *Transformation* – written as the War was ending – offers an especially striking example of this: combining a politically naïve Expressionist desire for individual and social regeneration with an often sharp analysis of the interplay of the gendered and racialised dimensions of national formation. This section thus closes with an extended reading of this play that brings together themes of political and artistic radicalism.

One of the distinctive characteristics of the revolutionary period in Munich was its scope. It lasted longer than in most other areas of Germany, it involved

93 See the KPD's statement warning workers against participation on 7 April 1919, 'Arbeiter! Folgt nur den Parolen der Kommunistischen Partei!' in *Dokumente und Materialien* 1966 VII: 1, pp. 59–61.

94 Quoted in Geyer 1998, p. 82. Kain was later purged from the reorganised KPD.

some of the farthest-reaching changes, and the city also saw some of the bloodiest counter-revolutionary violence. The declaration of the Bavarian Republic by the Independent Socialist Party (USPD) leader Kurt Eisner on 7 November 1918 predated the twin declarations of a Socialist Republic by Karl Liebknecht in Berlin and of a Parliamentary Republic by the SPD's Philipp Scheidemann in Weimar by two days, while the final repression of the Munich councils in late April 1919 occurred after much of the rest of the country had already been 'pacified' by the SPD-led state in concert with the military and the paramilitary *Freikorps*. Politically, there were a number of shifts between November 1918 and April 1919, with a reformist period giving way to the establishment of a short-lived Soviet Republic.⁹⁵

That these radical developments happened in Bavaria was in some ways rather surprising given the state's conservative tendencies. Certainly opposition to the War had emerged quickly in the largely Catholic state, building on long-standing resentment towards Prussian and Protestant domination of the German state. However, the economic base of Bavaria, the second largest German state after Prussia, was more heavily agricultural than other areas and many of the larger industrial concerns that did exist were new, in particular the armaments factories built during the War. As might be expected given this context, the left was relatively organisationally weak both in terms of political parties and trade unions. This was also the case with levels of class-consciousness among workers. Trade unions and the left did develop a strong presence in some factories, with many munitions workers participating in the wave of strikes in late January and early February 1918 described in the last chapter. As elsewhere, the SPD sought to block industrial action; factories like Krupp where the USPD had a strong influence showed the greatest militancy.⁹⁶ The relatively shallow base of the left in Bavaria thus made the subsequent revolutionary wave somewhat surprising. At the same time, however, the weakness of the SPD arguably opened up more room for other forms of radical politics, including the 'bohemian' and anarcho-socialist radicalism of the artist-revolutionaries.

The abdication of Bavaria's King Ludwig III and the apparent melting away of the old regime after the War led to a widespread, if not always enthusiastic, acceptance of the initial formation of a new government under the USPD's

95 On the revolutions in Bavaria, see Müller 1925a, pp. 191–202; Geyer 1998; Karl 2008; Lamb 1985, pp. 132–61; Mitchell 1965; Sternsdorf-Hauck 1989.

96 Grau 1993. Part of the weakness of the strikes compared with other areas was due to the rapid arrest of Kurt Eisner and other USPD leaders, which limited the extent to which strikes could be co-ordinated.

Kurt Eisner on the night of 7 November 1918. The hastily assembled workers', soldiers', and peasants' councils⁹⁷ formed the base of the new order, although in practice much of the old state and bureaucratic structure was left intact. What to do with existing state structures was a key problem faced by the left in the post-War period throughout Germany. The SPD tended to leave these structures largely intact at the national level, in part as a way to keep 'order' and defuse the perceived threat from the revolutionary left. Retaining these structures enabled old élites to buttress their social position, fatally weakening the bases of the Republic in many respects. Stronger attempts were made to reform the old bureaucracy in Bavaria than elsewhere – even the SPD head, Erich Auer, argued that this was necessary.⁹⁸ At the same time, though, Auer, who was serving as interior minister, worked behind the scenes with some success to contain council authority and push the state in a parliamentary direction.⁹⁹ For Kurt Eisner, the fact that the USPD leadership in Munich had gone further than the SPD in Berlin in removing the old bureaucratic leadership meant that the revolution had been able to progress further in his city.¹⁰⁰

Despite the greater willingness to revamp the old order, time constraints and the relatively vague sense of what changes were necessary, imposed serious limits on what was possible. Eisner shared a desire for order and stability with the SPD, arguing that while a break with the old regime was important, 'Bolshevism' also presented a serious threat.¹⁰¹ Unlike many of the other activists in Munich, Eisner had a long history with the SPD, having served as editor

97 Given the agricultural nature of Bavaria, peasants' councils (*Bauernräten*) played a greater role than elsewhere. The council activist Josef Breitenbach identified this as the unique aspect of events in Bavaria in his comments to the *Vollzugsrat* in Berlin on 30 November 1918 (see 'Sitzung des Vollzugsrates mit Vertretern der Räte Bremens und Münchens', in Engel et al. 1993, pp. 485–86). In practice, though, the peasants' councils remained relatively peripheral to revolutionary events, with Munich rather than the countryside remaining the centre of events (see Ziemann 2007, pp. 181–84).

98 For a contemporaneous account from 1918, see 'Der Demonstration auf der Thereisenwiese' 1983, p. 59. See also Mitchell 1965, pp. 116–22.

99 Mitchell 1965, pp. 151–69.

100 See Eisner's statement to the *Vollzugsrat* in Berlin on 25 November 1918, 'Sitzung des Vollzugsrates mit zeitweiliger Teilnahme von Vertretern der Regierungen Preußens und Bayerns', in Engel et al. 1993, pp. 342–43.

101 Eisner 1983. This fear of Bolshevisation was widespread, propagated in particular by conservative forces (as well as the SPD and many trade unions) as a way of containing the spread of revolution. Only a year after the Russian revolution, though, what Bolshevisation meant was, for most, rather vague, the term used to designate or denigrate a wide range of perceived dangers.

of the Party newspaper *Vorwärts* from 1900 to 1905, and trying unsuccessfully to steer a middle course in the debates over revisionism that had raged in the pre-War period.¹⁰² Where he and the USPD in Bavaria differed most strongly from the SPD was in the emphasis placed on councils. The SPD was suspicious of the council movement, even in areas where they controlled them. For the SPD, a constitutional National Assembly that would erect the new Republic on the basis of a parliamentary model was preferable. Those to the left of the SPD argued that the councils could either provide a 'third way', a system of dual parliamentary and council rule, or that councils should become the primary seat of authority. The latter position had been articulated by Rosa Luxemburg on 20 November 1918. She stressed that 'the bourgeoisie is not a parliamentary party, but a ruling class in possession of all the economic and social instruments of power', and that it was a fundamental betrayal of the basics of socialism to imagine that they could be made to give up this power should a National Assembly vote go against them.¹⁰³ As the revolutionary shop steward Ernst Däumig put it in the same year, 'the celebrated approval for the National Assembly is synonymous with a death sentence . . . for the council system'.¹⁰⁴

Eisner supported the 'dual approach', which called for combining the National Assembly and councils, although he argued that only when the latter had secured the revolution could the former be effective.¹⁰⁵ Eisner argued this view in a speech to the Munich workers' council on 5 December 1918. The councils could provide the opportunity for the working class to learn self-governance, he contended, which in time would mean that 'the opposition between leaders and masses that until now controlled us, will disappear'.¹⁰⁶ The councils, he believed, were the bearers of the revolutionary spirit, while the National Assembly should deal with more mundane political developments, a distinction that, as we shall see, animated the approach taken by many of the Munich radicals. In a speech to the *Vollzugsrat* (the Executive Council of the Berlin workers' and soldiers' council) on 25 November 1918, he further argued that especially after four and a half years of bloody war, the Bolshevik path needed to be avoided at all costs. Socialisation of industry was impossible in the context of economic collapse, he believed, but beyond these practical concerns he also rejected what he saw as economic reductionism of

102 Karl 2008, pp. 16–7; Pierson 1993, pp. 178–85.

103 Luxemburg 1986, p. 91.

104 Däumig 2007, p. 288. This was a speech given to the first Congress of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils on 19 December 1918 in Berlin.

105 Müller 1925a, p. 191; Lamb 1985, pp. 142–43.

106 Eisner 2007, p. 280.

Marxism. Countering what he saw as Bolshevik materialism, he proclaimed: 'I believe in the spirit and the power of ideas'.¹⁰⁷

Eisner's vision of the councils as a locus of working-class self-radicalisation had some similarities with the arguments of Marxists like Rosa Luxemburg. But his emphasis on spiritual values reflected a utopian and anarchist perspective that was also shared by many of the cultural radicals in Munich. Eisner saw the councils as a localised expression of everyday life, 'not as an executive organ, but as a control organ, a critical organ, in short, where the whole public, political, and social life should, in all its public character, be discussed and criticised'. Its function was seen as analogous to that of the press: '[t]he workers' councils should be a kind of living press'.¹⁰⁸ Councils would thus provide a kind of radical public sphere, the implication being that they had little to do with economic restructuring or day-to-day legislative work. For Eisner spiritual transformation thus remained separate from the dirty work of everyday politics, limiting the possible scope of any deeper transformation of social relations.

There were more radical tendencies within the council movement in Munich, including the Revolutionary Workers' Council (*Revolutionärer Arbeiterrat*, or RAR), but they had limited influence in the first months after the War. The Bavarian parliamentary elections of 12 January 1919 saw the SPD become the largest single party, with Eisner's USPD only receiving three per cent of the vote. But since Bavaria was still without a constitution to legitimise the election, Eisner remained prime minister while constitutional talks took place. Several councils, especially the RAR, became increasingly disillusioned with this situation, which contributed to the growing influence of the KPD in the council movement. The promise of November, of far-reaching political and economic change, had not been fulfilled. Thus, while Bavaria seemed to be heading for an SPD-dominated, centrist parliamentary government, forces to the left were also gathering momentum.¹⁰⁹

These incipient conflicts were galvanised on 21 February 1919. Eisner was on his way to cede power to the SPD, thereby also implicitly acknowledging the supremacy of the parliamentary system, when he was murdered by the

107 'Sitzung des Vollzugsrates mit zeitweiliger Teilnahme von Vertretern der Regierungen Preußens und Bayerns', in Engel et al. 1993, p. 340. On his critique of 'Bolshevism', see p. 351, where he admits that his understanding of imminent economic collapse emerged out of discussions with bankers.

108 Eisner 2007, p. 280.

109 Mitchell 1965, pp. 222–58.

21-year-old law student Count Anton Arco-Valley.¹¹⁰ For conservatives like Arco-Valley, Eisner had come to symbolise the revolutionary threat to social order and had 'attracted the hatred of the bourgeoisie. Even in his outer appearance he embodied the anti-bourgeois'.¹¹¹ An hour later Auer was shot and severely wounded in retaliation. In the events that followed, the councils attempted to assert their authority against parliament, with all sides claiming Eisner as a martyr for their cause. After a brief and unstable attempt by an SPD-led coalition to govern as a parliamentary republic, a Soviet Republic led by the Expressionist playwright Ernst Toller and centred on radical councils and the left of the USPD was declared in Munich.¹¹²

The KPD refused to endorse the experiment. On 5 April Eugen Leviné – who had been sent to Munich in March to develop and organise the local branch of the newly-formed KPD – argued that the new Soviet Republic was the work of pseudo-socialists (*Scheinsozialisten*), that communism could not simply be wished into being, and that any revolutionary movement needed to be based on a true dictatorship of the proletariat.¹¹³ Two days later the KPD further argued that given the ascendancy of counter-revolutionary forces in the rest of the country, the possibility of a successful revolution in Bavaria alone was inconceivable.¹¹⁴ In practice the influence of the government and the councils did not even reach that far, with only Munich itself truly subject

110 In a 1920 tribute to Eisner, Wilhelm Hausenstein argued that Eisner was not in fact capitulating to parliamentarism, but was instead laying the grounds for a renewed struggle between the ascendant forces of parliament and the councils: 'It was his plan to use the councils to revitalize socialism as a whole, to take up the feud against the parliamentary system – which he recognized as the historical ideal of the state in the bourgeois epoch – resolutely from atop the councils, and along his path to prepare the entire community of socialists for a new, more fundamental, and decisive revolution' (Hausenstein 1994, p. 53). This interpretation highlights the ambivalence of Eisner's politics and the different positions that could be read out of it.

111 Geyer 1998, p. 67.

112 For the declaration of the Soviet Republic, see 'An das Volk in Bayern!', in *Dokumente und Materialien*, series II: 3, pp. 357–58. Ernst Niekisch, who later went on to be a key figure in the National Bolshevik movement, signed on behalf of the revolutionary council leadership. On Toller's role, see Dove 1990, pp. 67–77.

113 'Erklärung der KPD, Landesverband Bayern, vom 5. April 1919 zur geplanten Ausrufung einer Räterepublik durch SPD und USPD', in *Dokumente und Materialien* II: 3, p. 356.

114 'Arbeiter! Folgt nur den Parolen der kommunistischen Partei! Arbeiter, Soldaten, werktätige Bauern Bayerns!', in *Dokumente und Materialien* 1958, II: 3, pp. 361–63.

to the movement's authority. Based on this assessment, the KPD limited their involvement to providing some assistance in organising a Red Army.¹¹⁵

The SPD's provisional government, led by Johannes Hoffmann, fled to Bamberg following the declaration of the Soviet Republic. They sought to undermine the council republic from a distance by using a number of tactics. One consisted in dropping leaflets from airplanes. The text of one of these leaflets demonstrates the extent to which counter-revolutionary propaganda was shaped by the language of degeneration: '[d]o you wish to be terrorised any longer by depraved literary types and revolutionary loafers! ... by a Dr. Levien, whose syphilis of the brain already led to an arrest warrant under Eisner's administration on the grounds of insanity endangering public safety ... by an Erich Mühsam, this ragged coffee-house literati who has not worked a single day in his whole life.'¹¹⁶ Propaganda was matched with direct action. On 13 April the SPD government in exile staged an attempted coup, with Ernst Schnepfenhorst, the minister of military affairs, leading the fight. The attempt was repulsed, and the KPD, under the leadership of Leviné and Levien, stepped up to take a lead role in establishing a communist council republic.

The KPD's decision to involve the Party more deeply in this latest phase of the revolution was not based on a revision of their earlier belief in its necessary failure. It was due to a conviction that the successful resistance to the coup attempt signalled that the broader working class was beginning to take a more active role in revolutionary events. The Party continued to see revolution in Bavaria alone as impossible, but once the working class (as opposed to the pseudo-radicals) was mobilised, they argued that the KPD should be at the head of the movement even if there was little chance of success. This decision reflected the tensions in the KPD between an ultra-left tendency which argued that any revolutionary upsurge marked an advance, and others (including Luxemburg and Paul Levi) who stressed the dangers of acting from a position of weakness.¹¹⁷ As we saw in the introduction, subsequent years saw the ultra-left tendencies lead the Party into disastrous engagements like the March Action.

Given the KPD's accurate assessment of the weakness of the Soviet Republic, its end was indeed swift and predictable. A large Red Army formed over the

115 See 'Resolution einer Soldatenversammlung in München am 3. April 1919 mit Forderungen zur Umwandlung der Soldatenräte in revolutionäre Kampforgane', in *Dokumente und Materialien* 1958, 11: 3, p. 348.

116 Quoted in Gerstenberg 2004, p. 57.

117 See Broué 2005, pp. 209–58.

two weeks that followed the revolution¹¹⁸ with Ernst Toller among those taking a leadership role. The SPD-led national government together with the Hoffmann government in exile responded by sending in troops and the *Freikorps*.¹¹⁹ The Red Army managed some victories in the fighting that ensued, but they were no match for their well-armed and experienced opponents, and the revolutionary forces were quickly crushed. The *Freikorps* then unleashed a period of counter-revolutionary terror. Many suspected of being activists in the revolution were summarily executed, with *Freikorps* fighters rampaging through Munich restoring 'order (Ill. 2)'. The dead, among them many of the leaders of the revolution, numbered up to 1,000 in the first six days of May, a slaughter that Richard Grunberger tellingly juxtaposes with the 13,600 Munich citizens who died in the four and a half years of war.¹²⁰ State approval was needed to carry out the executions, an approval that was forthcoming when the SPD members who made up half the decision-making body abstained from the vote.¹²¹ Leviné was one of those rapidly prosecuted, sentenced, and executed. But Ernst Toller was among those who managed to avoid capture for several days, thereby also avoiding what would almost certainly have been immediate execution. He was eventually captured and received a lengthy prison sentence.

118 The size estimates of the army vary from 10,000 to a newspaper report in 1919 of 30–60,000. Roos 1998, pp. 127–39 has found definitive documentation of 8,781 fighters, with the real total then lying somewhere above that.

119 As Levi 1919, p. 11 argued, this was not without its risks to the central government. With anti-Prussian sentiments high in Bavaria, the introduction of troops and *Freikorps* on Berlin's orders ran the risk of inflaming sentiment. Benjamin Ziemann emphasises that the Hoffmann government was initially reticent to deploy the *Freikorps*, but lack of success in mobilising a broad-based *Volkswehr* (people's army) to combat the radicals forced their hand (2007, pp. 230–31).

120 Grunberger 1973, p. 145. Mitchell 1965 says over 600 were killed in the first 24 hours. Dove 1990, p. 84, gives 600–1,200 dead for the six days. Geyer 1998, p. 88 estimates that more than 1,000 were either executed or killed in the fighting. See also Emil Julius Gumbel's powerful 1922 study, *Four Years of Political Murder* (1980). Gumbel carefully catalogued the killing resulting from the revolutionary violence on both sides, highlighting the much higher levels of right-wing violence compared with that of the left, as well as the lack of investigation and prosecution of right-wing murderers and the leniency shown those few convicted. He gives lower numbers of the dead in Munich, but only because he was extremely careful to count only those he could document. Concrete evidence did not exist in many cases (pp. 31–51).

121 Müller 1925a, p. 202.

No E-Rights

ILLUSTRATION 2 *George Grosz, "Ich dien" (Feierabend) ("I serve" [Evening's leisure]), from the portfolio Gott mit uns (God with Us), 1919, photolithograph, 38.7 × 29.8 cm. Grosz here depicts a Freikorps soldier in Munich surveying his work. The ordinariness of this counter-revolutionary violence is suggested not only by the subtitle of the image, but also by the pastoral nature of the scene. The title emphasises the patriotic narratives through which such violence was legitimised.*

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The bloody defeat of the revolutionary movements in Munich had a long-term impact on the political situation in Bavaria throughout the Weimar period. In the short term the SPD lost their dominant electoral position in the state, with the USPD gaining significantly in strength. However, this shift masked a more fundamental decimation of the left in Bavaria, a weakness evident in their inability to mobilise in response to later events like the Kapp putsch. The resurgence of the right was supported by much of Munich's bourgeoisie, who saw them as righting a world that had been turned upside down. As Martin Geyer argues, the impact of the counter-revolution also severely undermined the parliamentary Republic, making Bavaria ripe for radical right and Nazi agitation.¹²² The radical right and the Nazis also continued to direct their attacks at 'degenerate' cultural practices, with anti-Semitic themes common. Violent disruptions of theatrical productions by right-wing students – most notably performances of Frank Wedekind's *Schloss Wetterstein* – were emblematic of these tendencies. Wedekind's work was especially loathed for its treatment of themes of sexuality and transgression, with the disruptions of the play also characterised by physical assaults against those identified as Jewish.¹²³ In response to such attacks, many of the writers, artists, and political radicals who survived the events left Munich. This helped to further decimate the already limited social base of the left over the course of 1919.

The Munich events sparked a political debate between Paul Levi and Paul Frölich in the pages of the KPD's theoretical journal *Die Internationale* that was notable for its elaboration of some of the fundamental divisions within the Party, but also for demonstrating the limitations of the left in dealing with ideas of degeneration. Both writers agreed that the possibility of a successful revolution in Munich had been scant, but differed over what the Party should have done. Frölich defended the actions of Leviné and Levien and the conduct of the KPD throughout the events. He argued that '[t]he Bavarian Soviet Republic began as farce' but that '[i]t ended as tragedy' when the KPD was forced to step in during the attempted coup.¹²⁴ Frölich claimed that '[t]his was the signal

122 See Geyer 1998, pp. 94–129.

123 Jelavich 1985, pp. 301–5. The police were sympathetic observers to this right-wing violence, with the chief of police Ernst Pöhner suspending performances of the play under article 48 of the Weimar constitution, a suspension that was upheld by the courts. Wedekind was notable for his influence on theatrical Expressionism, as well as on the later agitprop theatre of Bertolt Brecht, who I will discuss in the final chapter. In the fifth chapter I will also look at the film *Pandora's Box*, which was based on Wedekind's play of the same name.

124 Werner 1920, p. 7. As noted earlier, P. Werner was Frölich's *nom de guerre*.

for the best part of the working class and the troops to enter into the battle', a moment that the KPD had to support. 'It [the response to the coup] resulted in victory, and this victory had to be consummated [*liquidiert*]. Now there was no more turning back. The most essential prerequisite existed: the victorious action of the masses'.¹²⁵ As he put it in his book on the Bavarian council republic, the street fighting transformed the 'carnival game of the pseudo-republic [*Fastnachtspiel der Scheinrätorepublik*]' into a 'dictatorship of the proletariat'.¹²⁶

Levi heaped his scorn on Fröhlich's argument, contending that what began as farce continued as such. In his view, the lack of readiness on the part of the masses throughout Germany, not just in Bavaria, meant that the KPD should have husbanded its resources and played a critical rather than an enabling role in relation to 'actions that are only pseudo-revolutionary and in reality can only lead to setbacks'.¹²⁷ He thus supported the actions of the Party up to the coup, but not after.¹²⁸ Levi's position was consistent with a Luxemburgist line, but he continued to come up against strong ultra-left putschist tendencies in the Party that argued for revolutionary action by a militant minority. The failed uprisings during the 'March Action' in 1921 seemingly confirmed Levi's arguments but despite this, as we saw, Levi's opposition to such precipitous actions led to his purging from the Party.¹²⁹

125 Werner 1919, p. 8. Levi picks up on the odd use of the term *liquidiert* in his critique; my translation as 'consummate' misses the sense of 'liquidate' also implied in the original.

126 Werner 1920, p. 32.

127 Levi 1919, p. 13. While his analysis here is correct, his contention that the Hoffmann government may have had to accommodate the demands of the Munich proletariat had the revolution not escalated is questionable.

128 Similar suggestions also came from outside the Party during the events. For example, the left-pacifist feminists Lida Gustava Heymann and Anita Augspurg met with Leven to try to convince him that the left faced impossible odds in an armed struggle, and that bloodshed should be avoided. Their memoirs echoed the SPD's rather hyperbolic claims, characterising him as a '[s]erious hysteric and psychopath' (Heymann and Augspurg 1972, p. 179). The two women had clashed with Leven and Leviné over the issue of violence before as well, leading a successful campaign by radical women against the adoption of the death penalty by revolutionary tribunals, thereby earning them the enmity of the two KPD leaders. Ironically, they recount, when Leven fled to Austria in the aftermath of the revolution, his extradition to face trial and likely execution was fought by the International Women's League for Peace and Freedom, with Heymann and Augspurg supporting these appeals. Leven expressed surprise, they say, and later acknowledged their action (pp. 179–80).

129 Ironically, Fröhlich himself later played an important role in the Socialist Workers' Party (SAP) of the early 1930s that was based on the Luxemburgist legacy kept alive through Levi's continued activism throughout the 1920s.

Despite their differences, Levi and Frölich did agree on one thing: their rejection of the bohemian character of the Munich Soviet. Levi's language on this issue is telling, echoing Frölich's description cited earlier. Suggesting that the revolution was conceived in the bohemian Café Stephani, he contended that 'this Soviet Republic was no "premature birth", as comrade Werner [i.e., Frölich] thinks, but a *prodigiosum aliquid*, a freak [*Mißgeburt*]; because the womb of the Majority Socialist-Independent-Anarchist coffee house circles is just as likely to produce a Soviet Republic as the womb of a gorilla is to produce a human child'.¹³⁰ Levi's use of metaphors of bodily monstrosity and childbirth draw heavily on discourses of degeneration so often applied to bohemian-artistic radicalism. The final analogy in particular draws on ideas of genetic inheritance inscribed in an incipiently racist suggestion of inter-species breeding as the source of the 'freakish' and non-human character of the 'pseudo-council republic'. The passage can be read simply as a rhetorical flourish, but to do so would be to ignore the broader contexts of the KPD's socialist hygiene. While Levi's dismissal of the bohemian left's lack of political acumen may have merit (an argument he later extended to the 'Bakuninist' mobilisation of the lumpenproletariat by Frölich and others in the March Action),¹³¹ his recourse to notions of degeneration translates these political debates into a rather troubling language of bodily purity. This reflects the difficulties that, as I will argue at greater length later in this and in subsequent chapters, the KPD and others on the left had in engaging critically with the politics of embodiment and social hygiene.

As Levi and others had contended as the events were taking place, the inevitability of the failure of the revolutionary movements in Munich was due to a complex series of factors. Prominent amongst these was the national balance of forces in April 1919 and local weakness in left organising. The latter included the inexperience and questionable politics of some of the utopian radicals leading the Munich movements. But the way in which the KPD, the socialist left, and the trade union movement shaped political mobilisation in Munich and elsewhere in Germany was also significant. Their positions betrayed a narrow conception of revolutionary mobilisation premised solely on class and lacking an analysis that included the various ways in which class intersected with other forms of social inequality and exploitation that ran along lines of gender, race, ability, or sexuality. In other words, the embodied nature of class was elided; indeed, it was precisely for considering these broader implications of a politics of embodiment that the bohemian left was so often derided.

130 Levi 1919, p. 9.

131 Levi 2009, pp. 135–37.

These were not merely concerns of representation or language, but had profound material implications. Perhaps the most significant example of this was around women's waged labour, a theme that ran through the previous chapter. During the War, many across the political spectrum had argued that women's participation in the labour force should be temporary. These arguments came from employers, but also trade unions, SPD leaders, and bourgeois women's organisations. All held that women were temporarily taking up positions that would be returned to male workers after the War. The implementation of this policy in the post-War period, I will argue, fundamentally shaped the nature of work and radical political organising, this despite the fact that it was often unsuccessful. It also undermined gains in women's equality in terms of voting and other civil rights.

These gains should not be underestimated. Under the Weimar constitution, women won the right to vote and gained formal equality in many other respects, although a number of key limitations on women's civil rights, most notably provisions such as the criminalisation of abortion, remained in place. More broadly, as Kathleen Canning argues, 'women's acquisition of citizenship rights opened possibilities for the emergence of new female subjectivities and self-representations, which at the very least made gender a site of continuous contention throughout the history of the republic'.¹³² Under the influence of feminist activists, Munich saw the establishment of a Department for Women's Rights to develop and implement changes, although it did not survive beyond the overthrow of the Soviet Republic.¹³³

In terms of women's labour, though, demobilisation generated significant pressure to return men to the workplace. Even when unsuccessful, the pressure shaped post-War social and political developments in important ways.¹³⁴ The same groups who had argued for the temporary nature of women's waged labour during the War now fought to displace women workers.¹³⁵ The state and the bourgeoisie lent ideological support to these measures. As Geyer suggests, though, in many cases women's lower wages meant that in fact employers often proved reluctant to hire or rehire men.¹³⁶ Ironically, then, women's workplace inequality in some cases protected their position, an example of

132 Canning 2006, p. 233.

133 Heymann and Augspurg 1972, pp. 173–74.

134 On the lack of success in purging women from workplaces, see Rouette 1993, pp. 53–80.

135 On the gendered dimensions of demobilisation, see Rouette 1993; Rouette 1997, pp. 51–64; Weitz, pp. 90–91, 100–31; Hagemann 1988. The classic account of demobilisation is Bessel 1993.

136 Geyer 1998, pp. 133–34.

the impact of the growing feminisation of labour. Trade unions thus saw stable or growing levels of women as members, but tellingly they rarely made their way into the overwhelmingly male leadership. The principle of the primacy of male employment was reflected in trade union policies. The 10th Trade Union Congress in 1919, for example, affirmed women's right to employment only for positions that, as Gertrud Hanna put it, 'accord with their characteristics and their strengths and abilities'.¹³⁷ The SPD government took a similar line, configuring demobilisation laws and policies so as to facilitate the reintegration of returning soldiers to the workforce at the expense of women workers.¹³⁸ In Munich the number of women who were forced to give their jobs to returning men numbered 40,000 in the armaments industry alone.¹³⁹ This did not go unchallenged, especially by women, with some stressing the danger of these policies. For example the Frankfurt council member and activist Toni Sender argued in a speech to the women's conference of the Leipzig USPD in late 1919 that the situation was unjust in principle, but that it also threatened the strength of the working-class movement.¹⁴⁰

The left's lack of attention to these gendered inequities arguably had an impact on their electoral fortunes as well. The left, especially the SPD, was surprised that women's suffrage did not necessarily translate into increased support.¹⁴¹ In city elections in Frankfurt in 1919, for instance, the SPD urged women to vote for the only party that had long supported women's suffrage, suggesting too that women could play a significant political role in the Party. Despite this claim, their call remained couched in the language of 'spiritual motherhood', focusing on poverty and illness, education, and community issues as concerns deemed most likely to resonate with women voters.¹⁴² The Party certainly did not deny women the right to work in principle, but supported the broad consensus against 'double earning', again promoting the primacy of male labour. They grounded this position in the familiar notion of women's caring nature:

137 Quoted in Rouette 1993, p. 132. On the debates in the trade union movement, see pp. 132–41.

138 Rouette 1993, pp. 141–47.

139 Karl 2004, p. 171.

140 Sender 2007, pp. 397–98.

141 Scheck 2004.

142 'Aufruf des Sozialdemokratischen Wahlkomitees an die Frauen Frankfurts' in Verein für Frankfurter Arbeitergeschichte 1997, pp. 893–95. The question of education was framed both in terms of children, but also as a mechanism that could facilitate women's ability to work; the SPD thus continued to support women's labour in some respects.

The unfortunate outcome of the war has robbed us further of food and raw materials, and has reduced the number of jobs. A wild fight between the sexes has broken out over jobs. It is up to you [women] to take care that, through careful insight into these relationships and cooperation with the responsible offices, this fight will be brought under control as soon as possible. Woman alone truly knows the work needs of women!¹⁴³

SPD appeals to women thus engaged with them as workers and ostensibly free agents, but re-inscribed these concerns in a conception of women as 'different, but of equal value [*gleichwertig, aber nicht gleichartig*]', as Marie Juchacz, founder of the Party's Workers' Welfare (*Arbeiterwohlfahrt*) organisation, put it in 1920.¹⁴⁴ This position was reflected in a 1919 government decree that 'persons who are not dependent upon their own earnings [i.e., married women with working husbands] are to refrain from working as long as there are others [i.e., men] who have a morally stronger right to work'.¹⁴⁵

Some socialist and communist feminists resisted this approach, stressing instead the need to think critically and concretely about the implications of women's suffrage. Charlotte Klein was unsurprised that suffrage had not helped the left, articulating the fear that women's suffrage would in fact help the right. Given the deeply entrenched nature of gendered norms and the lack of political experience this entailed amongst women, she argued that the government's 'proclamation of women's suffrage therefore cannot be interpreted as a step towards democracy'.¹⁴⁶ By stressing values of 'spiritual motherhood', the SPD approach to the question of gender reinforced bourgeois ideology, helping to maintain a separation of differentiated gendered spheres of politics. This tendency could be seen in the Party's channelling of women's activism into areas like the social welfare initiatives of the Workers' Welfare organisation or in consumer co-operatives.¹⁴⁷ As we saw during the War, such social

143 'Aufruf des Sozialdemokratischen Wahlkomitees an die Frauen Frankfurts', in Verein für Frankfurter Arbeitergeschichte 1997, p. 894.

144 Quoted in Hagemann 1988, p. 206.

145 Quoted in Rouette 1997, p. 57. These campaigns recurred throughout the Weimar period, especially in periods of economic upheaval. In 1922, for example, the Hamburg section of the free trade union association (the ADGB, or *Allgemeiner Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund*) argued for 'the reintroduction of a strengthened ban on the "double-earning of men and women of one family"' as a response to unemployment (quoted in Hagemann 1988, p. 214). This agitation peaked during the Depression beginning in 1929.

146 Klein 1918, p. 683.

147 On the *Arbeiterwohlfahrt*, see Eifert 1993; on co-ops, see Hagemann 1990, pp. 138–54. Agitation in the co-ops was one area that the KPD likewise targeted for agitation

welfare or consumer-based activism could take on radical forms, but in the post-War context this focus tended instead to reinforce the naturalised gendered roles associated with 'spiritual motherhood'.

For Klein and other communist feminists gender differences needed to be understood as socially constituted, and as central to working-class mobilisation. Thus, Clara Zetkin argued in December 1918 that women's 'role in the social economy as well as in the family is very often decisive for the outcome both of the class struggle between exploiters and the exploited, and the conduct of individual proletarians in this struggle. The conquest of political power through the proletariat must also be the act of principled women proletarians'.¹⁴⁸ In large part under the influence of these activists, the KPD was the only party to reject the campaign against 'double-earners' that provided the justification for rolling back women's participation in the workforce, marking a key difference with the SPD.¹⁴⁹ This challenge to the SPD was limited, however, with the KPD's own difficulties mobilising women stemming from the equally limited role afforded to women in the Party and the masculinist culture that, as I will discuss at greater length in the final chapter, shaped the Party as a whole.

As a result, some activists pushed for much deeper changes in how gendered relations were conceptualised. The council activist Toni Sender argued in 1919 that Zetkin tended to subsume the views and votes of women not engaged in wage labour under that of their husbands, thus still sustaining traditional gender differentiations.¹⁵⁰ Sender stressed the importance of mobilising women as workers, particularly the more marginalised and feminised workers doing piece-work at home. She also argued that organising women not working for wages was crucial to the success of the working-class movement. In her view, the capitalist and gendered division of labour ought not to prevent the left from recognising the significance of housewives, because 'their labour in the home enables their husbands for their part to engage in productive labour'.¹⁵¹ Zetkin increasingly endorsed this perspective as well, contending in the same year that the success of the council movement demanded the mobilisation of

(see 'Richtlinien für die Frauenagitation', in *Dokumente der revolutionären deutschen Arbeiterbewegung zur Frauenfrage* 1975, p. 93, originally published in 1920).

148 Zetkin 1975, p. 75.

149 See for example the resolution opposing the dismissal of these 'double-earners' passed in August 1921 ('Resolution gegen die Entlassung mitarbeitender Familienangehöriger', in *Dokumente und Materialien* 1958, VII: 1, pp. 558–60.

150 Sender 2007, p. 402.

151 Sender 2007, p. 401.

non-waged women. She suggested that this should take place through separate assemblies where these women could develop their political perspectives, and that councils should then have a proportion of seats reserved for women.¹⁵² For both Sender and Zetkin the councils thus had a specific pedagogical and political role for women.

Despite these arguments, KPD activism around questions of gender in the early Weimar years was rather limited. This was also the case with councils, where the policy of promoting men's primary role in wage labour served, as Sender argued, to exclude women systematically from the council movements themselves.¹⁵³ Whether the councils were dominated by the SPD, or fell more under the influence of the USPD, KPD, or other radical currents, had little impact on this gender dynamic. This was certainly the case in Munich, where the push to exclude women from the labour force was mutually reinforced by the increasing dominance of men in the council movement. The workers', soldiers' and peasants' councils there decreed that while women would not in principle be excluded from voting, those who were 'exclusively or predominantly engaged in supporting their own families', a provision targeting 'double-earners', would not have a vote.¹⁵⁴ Thus, not even all wage-earning women would be given full rights in the councils. Ironically, as Christiane Sternsdorf-Hauck points out, radical women could now vote for a bourgeois parliament with which they had little sympathy, but were largely denied the vote in the councils. As a result very few women took part in political assemblies, with only eight women serving in Munich's Provisional National Assembly and the Congress of Workers', Soldiers' and Peasants' Councils.¹⁵⁵

Despite these structural impediments to participation, women were central to the revolutionary movements in Munich. Two of the most prominent radical pacifists and USPD members, Anita Augspurg and Lida Gustava Heymann – who had also led protests during the War and were very active in the waves of strikes in 1918 – were based in Munich. Augspurg was one of the eight women in the Provisional National Assembly and was involved in setting up women's councils that were intended to help develop women's political abilities and consciousness.¹⁵⁶ This focus on education was a key dimension of women's

152 Zetkin 1919, pp. 19–20.

153 Sender 2007, pp. 397–98.

154 Quoted in Sternsdorf-Hauck 1989, p. 43.

155 Sternsdorf-Hauck 1989, pp. 41–42. This was the case elsewhere as well. In Hamburg, for example, the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils included only one woman, the left radical Erna Halbe, as a member of the executive (see Hagemann 1988, pp. 204–5).

156 Heymann and Augspurg 1972, pp. 157–85.

organising, with a variety of groups forming to address real and perceived gaps in women's political knowledge.¹⁵⁷ As Elma Klingelhöfer argued in a speech to the Association of Socialist Women, the struggle for the vote had so consumed the women's movement that not enough attention had been paid to politics more generally. Invoking a radicalised 'spiritual motherhood', she contended that the 'woman is indispensable to the party, in order for parties to be penetrated by the spirit of women, the character of women'.¹⁵⁸ A motion from Augspurg, Heymann, and others was put to the 7 March 1919 Council Congress, arguing for 'the extension and supplementation of the council system through the establishment of women's councils in order to enable the counteraction of reactionary propaganda through the enlightenment and politicisation of women on the ground'.¹⁵⁹ Augspurg argued that the separate councils would likely be needed for five or ten years, the time required for women to become more skilled politically, and able to take their place within the main workers' and soldiers' councils. The motion failed, opposed by many, but most strongly the SPD majority.¹⁶⁰

For all their radical potential, then, the council movement provided very limited avenues for the re-articulation of gender relations, in some ways even falling short of the formal equality won by women in the parliamentary state. This did not prevent women from continuing to be active in other areas of the struggle. Women played a prominent role in the fight against the SPD's coup attempt. As the Red Army commander Erich Wollenberg described it, 'after the firing started, they [women activists] placed themselves between the fighters, and successfully secured the capitulation of the hesitant White Guardists'.¹⁶¹ While examples like this were significant, they remained limited. If we contrast these developments with the much broader significance of women's mobilisation during the War, we can see that Sender, Zetkin, and others were absolutely correct in highlighting the counter-revolutionary impact of limiting women's labour and political involvement; the radical energy and organisational potential of wartime mobilisations were effectively dispersed in the immediate post-War years, representing a massive strategic loss for the left.

The case of women's waged labour and political participation demonstrates the extent to which the left, ranging from the SPD to the KPD, was hampered by

157 Karl 2004, pp. 175–76.

158 Quoted in Sternsdorf-Hauck 1989, pp. 22–23. The attribution of the speech to Klingelhöfer is based on Sternsdorf-Hauck's speculation.

159 Quoted in Mühsam 1980, p. 197.

160 Heymann and Augspurg 1972, pp. 175–77; Karl 2004, p. 179.

161 Quoted in Karl 2004, p. 180.

a profoundly masculinist understanding of class. Here we can see the material impacts of the resistance on the left to theorising and mobilising around multiple forms of oppression. In this respect we can find much richer resources in the cultural and political practices of the anarchist-oriented and cultural left in Munich so often denounced by the KPD. Their concern with marginality and 'outsiderness' often involved a romanticisation of dissident figures (a problem we saw earlier in Benjamin's work). But their attentiveness to the ways in which structures of domination functioned through: (1) gender, sexuality and racialisation, and (2) the medicalisation and repression of non-normative forms of subjectivity and embodiment were of great significance. Their utopian projects for spiritual and cultural renewal could be politically naïve, but they engaged with dissident forms of embodiment and subjectivity in productive ways, offering an important corrective to the narrow class focus of the broader left.

As I have noted, many of the participants in the revolutionary events in Munich tended to reject Marxism in favour of anarchism, or developed anarcho-socialist alternatives. Eisner, for example, possessed an ethical conception of the state shaped by Kant and the neo-Kantianism of Hermann Cohen. Cohen saw the state as the embodiment of ethical consciousness; the injustice of the existing class-based state (a *Machtstaat*, not a *Rechtsstaat* – that is, a power-based rather than a rights-based state) meant that it did not fulfil the ethical imperative of the ideal state, a disjuncture that impelled a commitment to a democratic socialism.¹⁶² His influence was especially evident in Eisner's desire for an ethically based unity of classes and interests. For Eisner, this entailed a vision of politics as a kind of art form, a position shared by many other cultural activists in Munich. He argued in 1919 that 'governing is as much an art as painting pictures or composing string quartets. The object of this political art, the material with which this political art is supposed to work, is society, the state, humanity'. Echoing the distinction he drew between the role of councils and that of the National Assembly, he continued: '[t]he artist must, as an artist, be an anarchist and as a member of society, as a citizen dependent on the bourgeoisie for the necessities of life, a socialist'.¹⁶³

In some ways this conception of politics can be seen as a radicalised version of the *Burgfrieden* and the unity of August 1914, which also stressed a desire for a unity transcending class, and which had provided a compelling narrative for

162 Cohen's influence on Eisner is discussed in Dove 1990, p. 42. Wright 1987, pp. 584–87 traces the influence of Cohen and neo-Kantianism on Expressionist artists more generally, and in particular on their vision of the 'new man'.

163 Kurt Eisner, 'The Socialist Nation and the Artist', in Long 1993, pp. 179–80.

many intellectuals at the time. If Thomas Mann had grounded his nationalist support for war on the legacy of the German cultural heritage, his brother Heinrich Mann put forward a much more inclusive conception of cultural unity in an address to the Political Council of Intellectual Workers in Munich in November 1918. Challenging what he saw as the limits of a Marxian approach, he argued against the primacy of economic well-being, arguing that '[s]piritual well-being is more important, for the fate of mankind is more determined by its way of feeling and thinking than by economic rules'.¹⁶⁴ Naïvely urging the bourgeoisie to accept what he considered the secondary economic demands of the working class, he promoted instead a Germany where 'the mind will finally rule'. 'We intellectual workers want to have the merit of being among the first to reconcile Germany with the world'.¹⁶⁵ This desire for spiritual transformation was clearly at odds with the KPD's view. As Benjamin later argued, Mann's notion of intellectual leadership derived from the Activist movement promoted by Kurt Hiller, which

attempted to replace materialistic dialectics by the notion of common sense – a notion that in class terms is unquantifiable. Activism's intellectuals represent at best a social group. In other words, the very principle on which this collective is formed is reactionary. No wonder its effects could never be revolutionary.¹⁶⁶

Far more formidable as a challenger to Marxian conceptions of revolution was the long-time anarchist and SPD member Gustav Landauer, whose influence on the cultural and bohemian left in Munich was immense.¹⁶⁷ Landauer himself participated in the revolutions, serving as Commissar for People's Enlightenment in the period between Eisner's murder and the KPD's taking of control. His communitarian anarchism took him further than Eisner in supporting the radical council movement against parliamentarist tendencies.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁴ Mann 1994, p. 39.

¹⁶⁵ Mann 1994, p. 40.

¹⁶⁶ 'The Author as Producer', in Benjamin 1999b, p. 773. Along with Hiller, Benjamin includes Heinrich Mann and Alfred Döblin as other influential proponents of Activism during the Weimar period.

¹⁶⁷ On Landauer, see Lunn 1973; Maurer 1971.

¹⁶⁸ See, for example, Landauer's 10 December 1918 speech to the Bavarian Workers' Councils 'Gegen den alten Parlamentarismus, für das Rätesystem' (pp. 78–79), and his 17 January 1919 letter 'Parlamentarismus und Rätesystem' (pp. 130–31) in which he expresses his misgivings about Eisner's politics (both in Linse 1974).

After the overthrow of the Soviet Republic, Landauer, like so many others, was arrested and brutally murdered by counter-revolutionary forces.¹⁶⁹

Landauer took up many of the emancipatory themes of early German Romanticism, developing an anarchist orientation towards political change that emphasised individual transformation as well as the centrality of art and artists.¹⁷⁰ He had been a part of the *Jungen* rebellion – the radical opposition within the SPD in the late nineteenth century that had fought the shifts to centralisation and reformism in the Party.¹⁷¹ Opposed to what he saw as the petty materialist, state-oriented and economistic tendencies of Marxian socialism, Landauer called for a socialism stemming from a revolution in the spirit that entailed shedding the rationalised, stultifying strictures of modern capitalism, and the inauguration of a new type of freedom currently being blocked by the state. Landauer had presented this anti-state position as a challenge to Marx as far back as 1893. In an article in *Der Sozialist* he wrote: '[f]or Marx the way to a non-authoritarian society is through authority, the way to statelessness is through the state ... That was his great error ... If I want a society without authority, then I cannot strive for authority'.¹⁷² Indeed, as Landauer argued in his major work, *Call to Socialism* (1911), Marxism and socialism are opposites: 'Marxism – unspirit, the paper blossom on the beloved thornbush of capitalism. Socialism – the new force against rottenness; the culture that rises against the combination of un-spirit, hardship, and violence, against the modern state and modern capitalism ... Marxism: it is the plague of our time and the curse of the socialist movement'.¹⁷³ Landauer was influenced by Nietzsche, but also by the medieval theologian and rebel Thomas Müntzer, and by medieval forms

169 For contemporaneous accounts of his murder, see Karl 2008, p. 188; Linse 1974, pp. 252–54. The military falsely claimed that he was shot attempting to flee.

170 On early German Romanticism and radical politics, see Blechman 1999. As Campbell argues, there was a major upsurge in Romantic responses emerging out of the War and post-War crises (1989, pp. 107–30). This 'quest for utopias' drove various forms of radical thought especially in the first few years of the Weimar period, including those perspectives I am examining here.

171 Pierson 1993, pp. 19–34; Bock 1969, pp. 5–12. In a debate with Paul Ernst at the time, though, he argued against a special revolutionary role for art (see Pierson 1993, pp. 55–56). The *Jungen* group in turn split between more individualist and anarchist members like Landauer and those who called for mass action on the part of a revolutionary working class.

172 Quoted in Ossar 1980, p. 71.

173 Landauer 1978, p. 60. The title of this English translation is *For Socialism*, but I will use the more literal translation of the original *Aufruf zum Sozialismus*, which captures more effectively the spiritual and quasi-messianic quality of his work.

of peasant communal organisation. These historical examples grounded his support for the council movement; in his January 1919 preface to a new edition of *Call to Socialism*, written during the relative lull in the revolutionary events in Munich, he argued that, as Kropotkin had suggested, 'we must return to rural living and to a unification of industry, craftsmanship and agriculture, to save ourselves and learn justice and community'.¹⁷⁴

These visions of regeneration through agricultural labour and organic community were politically ambivalent, reflecting the broader nostalgic desire for organic community that we saw earlier in ideas of *Gemeinschaft*. Indeed, the Weimar period saw many right-wing projects for national renewal that likewise called for rural and colonial settlement to alleviate fears over demographic shifts.¹⁷⁵ Despite this strong nostalgic tendency, however, Landauer's writing shared something with the dialectical approach that we saw in Benjamin's work. He argued in the 1919 foreword to *Call to Socialism* that

the transformation of social institutions, of property relations, of the type of economy cannot come by way of revolution. In these matters, action from below can only shake off, destroy and abandon something; action from above, even by a revolutionary government, can only abolish and command, whereas socialism must be built, erected, organized out of a new spirit. This new spirit prevails mightily and ardently in the revolution. Robots become men. Cold, unimaginative men are fired with enthusiasm. The entire *status quo*, including opinions, positive and negative, is cast into doubt.¹⁷⁶

Especially in this later foreword, the place of the nostalgic community is ambivalent; it is less a call for a return to an older plenitude, and more a parable evoking a bodily transformation in which the inert matter of an alienated social world is transmuted into living tissue.

Along with his rejection of what he saw as the economic reductionism of Marxism, these arguments continued Landauer's long-standing criticism of SPD revisionism for endlessly deferring the revolutionary moment to a receding future. In this respect, he shared the perspective of Luxemburg and the KPD. Landauer argued that the revolution must come immediately, for it was precisely through revolutionary struggle that the new spirit is enacted. 'If we

¹⁷⁴ Landauer 1978, p. 25.

¹⁷⁵ Weipert 2006, pp. 75–122.

¹⁷⁶ Landauer 1978, p. 21.

want a society, then we must construct it, we must practice it'.¹⁷⁷ The councils could thus provide an authentic community and solidarity in opposition to all other forms of social organisation – religion, church, feudal society, the state, or the nation – that always benefitted the rich and tyrants, and that represented a distortion of and imposition on what he argued was a natural community.¹⁷⁸ Landauer's conception of revolution thus points both back to the medieval communal form and forward to a post-revolutionary future.

Despite his emphasis on rural life and authenticity, Landauer did not possess a *völkisch* vision of the nation, which he saw as an artificial construct that stifles spirit. His anti-nationalism became even more evident after 1900 when, as Michael Löwy argues, Landauer turned from Christian to Jewish traditions as the basis for his anarcho-socialism. In contrast to popular anti-Semitic arguments that stigmatised Jews as outsiders, Landauer saw the link between Jewish experience and socialism in the internationalism of the Jewish Diaspora.¹⁷⁹ He thus opposed both assimilation and Zionism for their reductionist and closed approaches to human community. Instead, he found in the diaspora the source for a grounded, rural community that was not rooted in (national) place.¹⁸⁰

Landauer's belief in spiritual revolution also placed a premium on art as an expression of community and as a transformative resource, a quasi-primitivist moment that he shared with many radical artists. He did not conceive of art as a separate sphere, but even more than Eisner saw it as something that could transcend the bourgeois and capitalist separation of spheres. Art and artists were a kind of vanguard carrying the memory and the practice of socialism. In conditions where most people are submerged under the muck and misery of an oppressive, un-spiritual social order, artists and other visionary individuals keep alive the image of true socialism and embody the possibility of social transformation. It is here that Landauer's denunciation of Marxism in *Call to Socialism* is fiercest, for he argues that Marxism is utterly incapable of responding to this spiritual call.

As Commissar for People's Enlightenment, Landauer was briefly able to try to implement his vision. In his less than a week in office he proposed a major

177 Landauer 1978, p. 125.

178 Landauer 1978, pp. 32–35.

179 This was an argument developed by Arnold Zweig (2004) as well.

180 Löwy 1992, pp. 128–37. Lunn 1973, pp. 138–49 places more emphasis on the *völkisch* dimensions of his thought, quoting Landauer in 1915 on the nation: 'The nation is the peculiar manner in which, on the basis of the cohesion resulting from a common historical development, the generally human and the individual express themselves at the same time' (1973, p. 264).

series of reforms to education and culture based on a decentralised model that stressed student autonomy. Laying out these proposals on 12 April 1919, Landauer argued that they were about 'a complete reorganisation of all the communal institutions serving the spirit'.¹⁸¹ The University of Munich was closed pending reorganisation, which was to include the abolition of faculties of theology and law, and the promotion of philosophy as the central faculty. The entire school system was to be reorganised around a more egalitarian form of schooling [*Einheitsschule*] that was central to many left programmes for educational reform. Landauer also immediately decreed the socialisation of the press – although he had no time to implement this in practice – and he proposed a massive reorganisation of the arts under the aegis of architecture.¹⁸² None of these proposed changes had a lasting effect. Landauer himself stepped back from his position when the KPD took on a leading role. He offered them some support, but fundamentally disagreed with their denunciations of the 'pseudo-Soviet republic'. 'The socialism that is being realised brings all creative energies to life; however, in their [the communists'] works, I regret to say that in relation to economic and spiritual areas, and I deplore seeing this, that they lack understanding'.¹⁸³

Landauer had a significant influence on the artist radicals in Munich, especially on Expressionist artists like Ernst Toller.¹⁸⁴ His conception of the artist as leader was especially influential, marking a key point at which the artistic radicals diverged from the communist left.¹⁸⁵ Erich Mühsam, a friend of Landauer who was far more directly involved than the latter in day-to-day council organising, sought to bridge some of these gaps between the KPD and other left tendencies. His work is especially important for its suspicion of ideas of intellectual leadership or vanguardism. Instead, he saw marginalised social groups as the catalysts of revolution. Mühsam was a playwright, essayist, cabaret artist, and theatre critic who had met Landauer in 1900 in the group The New Society (*Die neue Gemeinschaft*) that had worked to develop a communal society based on a pseudo-religious anarchist individualism. Both soon left,

181 Landauer, 'Die Grundsätze der Arbeit des Ministeriums für Volksaufklärung', in Linse 1974, p. 232.

182 For a sketch of the proposals, see Landauer, 'Kulturprogramm', in Linse 1974, pp. 235–48. See also Karl 2008, pp. 185–87.

183 Landauer, letter to the 'Aktionausschuß', in Linse 1974, p. 248.

184 Williams 1993.

185 There are connections here to the question of the role of the 'vanguard' that was so central to many communist debates, a question that I will return to later in the chapter.

with Mühsam rejecting the closed nature of the group.¹⁸⁶ His individualist anarchism was similar in many ways to that of Landauer, although much less systematic and driven by a powerful hatred of the state.¹⁸⁷ He had a strong desire for open and inclusive movements and also believed that art should be accessible and engaged. During the First World War he worked to develop a broad-based anti-war movement that included bourgeois-pacifist groups along with the left and, with Anita Augspurg, argued for the establishment of a 'left majority [*linksmehrheit*]' that would transcend party differences.¹⁸⁸

At the heart of Mühsam's conception of revolution was a desire to overturn and break down convention. This placed him firmly in the bohemian camp denigrated by conservatives and the communist left alike. As he put it in 1913:

In the revolution, destruction and construction are identical. Every destructive desire is a creative desire (Bakunin). Some forms of revolution: tyrannicide, deposing a sovereign power, the establishment of a religion, breaking old tablets (in convention and in art), creating an artwork; the sex act. Some synonyms of revolution: God, life, being in heat [*Brunst*], intoxication [*Rausch*], chaos. Let us be chaotic!¹⁸⁹

Along with many other modernist artists and writers, he claimed an affinity with '[c]riminals, vagrants, whores and artists – these are the bohemians who know the way to a new culture'.¹⁹⁰ In a sense, as the KPD argued, this approach marked a kind of internal bourgeois revolt, a rejection of bourgeois values by bourgeois artists that offered few resources for the working-class movement. However, as I suggested in my discussion of Benjamin earlier, these forms of identification also accessed radical energies that, in the case of Mühsam, were developed in an especially powerful way.

186 Shepherd 1993, pp. 10–20. For all his bohemianism, he rejected the insular nature of counter-cultural movements, including the counter-cultural community at Ascona, Switzerland where he, along with many others, spent some time several years later (see Green 1986).

187 Mühsam's memorial written for Landauer's posthumous fiftieth birthday in 1920 called him a revolutionary: 'Revolutionary, however, means one who overthrows, destroys, builds anew [*Umstürzer, Zerstörer und Neuschaffer*]' ('Gustav Landauer', in *Fidus* 1978, p. 97).

188 Shepherd 1993, pp. 34–35. On art, see Mühsam 1999. On Augspurg's argument for this position, see Kinnebrock 2005, pp. 436–39.

189 Mühsam 1913, p. 2.

190 Mühsam, 'Bohème', in Anz and Stark 1981, p. 394. On Expressionism and radical bohemianism more broadly, see Pachter 1983.

Mühsam distinguished himself from many other artistic radicals because he grounded his work in concrete attempts to theorise and put into practice a politics of marginality. In 1908–9, Mühsam had attempted to organise the lumpenproletariat which most socialists generally dismissed as a counter-revolutionary force. He thus sought to include elements from what he referred to as the ‘Fifth Estate’ such as petty criminals, unemployed youth, sex workers, draft dodgers, and others in a political movement of the marginalised. He named this organisation *Gruppe Tat*. Although it was rather unsuccessful as a political organisation, it reflected his dissatisfaction with organised socialist politics that, he argued, had a tendency to depend on and replicate the restrictive practices of capitalist society and culture, especially in terms of its stifling and narrow morality.¹⁹¹ Rather than the collective solidarity of the workplace emphasised by the Marxian left, Mühsam held that true radicalism came out of the suffering of isolation.

Mühsam later became more sympathetic to Marxism, but in his pre-War writings and activism he argued that it was not only or even primarily the industrial proletariat that was oppressed by capitalism and the state. He disparaged the organised activities of the socialist movement which, he wrote in 1909, led the proletariat to a position in which ‘[t]hey are willing to pay for their longing for a somewhat higher level of comfort with their undiminished mercenary work. This desire has displaced their yearning for freedom’.¹⁹² In contrast, Mühsam held that a more radical conception of freedom emerged not simply from one’s class position or a desire for material improvements, but rather out of a powerful experience of and feeling for the violence of oppression: ‘one who feels the whip is in fetters – and some of the tormented feel the whip on the backs of others as strongly as when it smacks against their own’.¹⁹³ This experience of oppression characterised the life of the ‘Fifth Estate’, giving them a powerful political potential held back primarily by their lack of a sense of their own significance. Drawing on a Bakuninist affinity with the

191 Mühsam describes the group and its first meeting in ‘Neue Freunde’, in *Fidus* 1978, pp. 34–6. See also Jelavich 1985, pp. 276–79; Shepherd 1993, pp. 27–30.

192 Mühsam, ‘Neue Freunde’, in *Fidus* 1978, p. 34. This argument certainly rings true in many respects, and, it could be argued, is quite similar to the critique of reformism in the SPD advanced by Luxemburg and others. They too stressed that the search for incremental gains did not address the fundamental exploitation at the heart of capitalism, and weakened the revolutionary project.

193 Mühsam, ‘Neue Freunde’, in *Fidus* 1978, p. 34.

lumpenproletariat, Mühsam argued that they were 'general-strikers through inner compulsion'.¹⁹⁴

The *Gruppe Tat* did not last long. Mühsam was arrested and charged with engaging in subversive activities such as conspiring to blow up buildings around Germany. The ensuing trial included a rather extensive airing of Landauer's beliefs and their influence on Mühsam, but ended when the charges were dropped. Following his arrest Mühsam's work was shunned by the publications in which he had previously appeared.¹⁹⁵ In his trial, prosecutors focused strongly on a distinctive aspect of Mühsam's life and work, his association with homosexuals.¹⁹⁶ He had defended homosexual rights for a number of years, placing a great importance on dissident sexual practices for a radical politics. The radical psychoanalyst Otto Gross, who argued that structures of domination emerged first in the exercise of authority in the family, was a significant influence in this respect. Gross had studied with Freud, but after moving to Munich in 1906, he came to reject Freud's belief that the sublimation of the sexual instinct was a necessary element of psychic and social order, arguing instead for the revolutionary potential of sexual desublimation. 'The psychology of the unconscious', he argued in 1913, 'is the philosophy of the revolution'.¹⁹⁷

Building on Gross's work, Mühsam questioned dominant conceptions of gender and sexuality. He agitated for the decriminalisation of homosexuality under paragraph 175, rejected bourgeois morality and marriage, and argued for women's rights, including abortion rights. In his conception of homosexuality he initially followed the prominent sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld's view that homosexuality was innate, and very different from such 'pathological perversities' as masochism, sadism, and fetishism with which it was so often associated

194 Mühsam, 'Neue Freunde', in *Fidus* 1978, p. 35.

195 Mühsam describes the trial in 'Mein Geheimbund' (pp. 56–64), and rails against the rejection of his work in 'Protest' (pp. 53–56), both in Mühsam 1978, 2. His protest was published in *Die Zukunft* alongside a statement of support, signed by Hermann Bahr, Heinrich Mann, Thomas Mann, and Frank Wedekind, that argued publishing decisions should be made solely on artistic grounds (see Mühsam 1978, 2, p. 732n53).

196 See Mühsam 1996, pp. 91–110 for accounts of the trial, including excerpts from court transcripts, which highlight these accusations. His defence of homosexuality had left him at odds with Landauer.

197 Gross 1913, p. 384. This article was written as a response to Gustav Landauer's critique of psychoanalysis. For all the commonalities between Mühsam and Landauer, there remained substantial differences: Landauer's rejection of psychoanalysis was of a piece with the nostalgic anti-modernism that was an important element of his thought, but from which Mühsam diverged.

in popular and scientific conceptions.¹⁹⁸ Mühsam argued that homosexuality was related to creative artistic expression, a position that reversed its negative valuation in discourses of degeneration.¹⁹⁹ In subsequent years, though, he came to see homosexuality more as an expression of a broader radical individual freedom than as something innate, a choice whose implications were revolutionary in threatening structures of family and state domination.²⁰⁰

Mühsam's emphasis on sexual liberation was ambivalent in relation to gender politics. While he argued that women's oppression was the result of capitalist social relations that rendered them economically dependent on men, he nevertheless tended to see women primarily in terms of reproduction; the establishment of more egalitarian gender relations would, he contended, enable women to fulfil their reproductive role in a liberated context.²⁰¹ From this perspective, he rejected the focus of much of the bourgeois and left women's movement on suffrage and greater workplace equality; both fights, he argued, accommodated the power of capital and the state, and could never lead to true emancipation. Mühsam's take on sexuality and reproduction thus involved a very radical politics of sexual liberation that also included women's sexual autonomy, but a general disinterest in more concrete issues of civil or economic rights. As he argued in 1913, '[t]he female gender will be inferior to men as long as the private affairs of women remain under the control of men, the sexual inexperience of girls is society's measuring rod for their virtue, and women's sexual life outside of state-sanctioned marriage is considered disdainful and immoral. As long as this is the case, women should not reach for titles of formal equal rights and opportunities'.²⁰²

Mühsam's concern with gender, sexuality, and the role of the lumpenproletariat carried over into the post-War period, but by that time he sought to develop connections with the broader radical left. This included participation in the formation of a quasi-party, the *Vereinigung Revolutionärer Internationalisten Bayerns* (the Bavarian Organisation of International Revolutionaries), that was expressly not just an anarchist group, but an organisation that sought to bridge the different revolutionary tendencies. Despite his frustration with the KPD's initial reluctance to join the second phase of the revolution, their desire for

198 'Die Homosexualität: Ein Beitrag zur Sittengeschichte unserer Zeit', in Mühsam 1996. For his arguments against paragraph 175, see pp. 58–68, and on the question of perversion, pp. 38–40.

199 Mühsam 'Die Homosexualität' in Fidus 1978, pp. 52–56.

200 Lawrence Baron, 'Mühsams individualistischer Anarchismus', in Fidus 1978, pp. 159–60.

201 Wright 1987, pp. 592–93.

202 Mühsam, 'Kultur und Frauenbewegung', in Fidus 1978, p. 59.

control, and their sectarianism, he continued to work for a common front.²⁰³ Indeed, he argued that Leninism offered a non-reformist Marxism that was compatible with his anarcho-socialism and the council movement.²⁰⁴ While he never fully overcame his earlier suspicions of the KPD, by 1920 he was arguing that the lack of a German revolutionary tradition and the SPD's focus on the ballot box meant that only '[s]ince November 1918 is the German proletariat revolutionary, and in fact conscious in a communist spirit'.²⁰⁵

Mühsam later revisited the role of gender and sexuality in the revolutionary events in Munich in his remarkable 1931 essay 'Council Republic and Sexual Revolution'. There he argues that all revolutions were shaped by powerful and conflicting erotic energies and gendered social interactions. He laments the fact that sexual and gender liberation played such a minor role in the revolutionary politics in Munich, although he acknowledges that the precarious and short-lived nature of the Soviet made it difficult to move in this direction. He points out, though, the important work done by Anita Augspurg, Lida Gustava Heymann, and others who argued for a greater attention to questions of gender in the revolution.²⁰⁶ The main problem, he contends, was that the potential of the revolution was blocked through the containment and channelling of its emancipatory erotic and sexual energies. This was because the revolution produced an 'air flush with eroticism' that frightened many on the left, especially the reformist, petit-bourgeois left, and led them to resist its movement.²⁰⁷ More importantly, he argues, counter-revolutionary mobilisation was highly sexualised. Mühsam cites the myth that the revolutionaries had socialised the women of Munich, widely propagated in the bourgeois and right-wing press, as crucial to the delegitimisation of revolutionary forces. The counter-revolution was also enacted directly through a sexualised violence against women. Thus, he describes *Freikorps* executions in which women were shot in their genitals as one example of the overarching misogynist and sexualised violence characteristic of counter-revolutionary repression.²⁰⁸

In a certain sense Mühsam's conception of the erotics of revolution has a strong affinity with Benjamin's notion of revolution as 'bodily collective inner-vation' that we saw earlier. Mühsam was arguably even more carefully attuned

203 Shepherd 1993, pp. 36–7; Lamb 1985, pp. 149–51.

204 Mühsam 1919, pp. 697–98.

205 Mühsam 'Die revolutionäre Prädisposition des deutschen Proletariats', in *Fidus* 1978, pp. 95–96.

206 Mühsam 1980, pp. 196–97.

207 Mühsam 1980, p. 198.

208 Mühsam 1980, p. 200.

to concrete social practices of marginalisation than Benjamin, despite his tendency to also romanticise and naturalise aspects of 'outsiderness'. Especially after he began to engage with the communist left, Mühsam's work offered an account of what we might today call the intersectionality of class relations with other forms of oppression. As with elements of the socialist women's movement, he lamented the lack of awareness of these intersections in left mobilisations.

Mühsam's conception of revolution was also rooted deeply in his aesthetics. He saw revolution as a radically creative act that presupposed the dissolution of the distinction between 'head' and 'hand' workers; 'fugitives from the bourgeoisie', among them Lenin, Trotsky, Liebknecht, Luxemburg, and Landauer, embodied this integrated approach.²⁰⁹ He continued to hold to a distinction between 'high' and 'low' art, although he generally sought to make his own cultural production accessible to a wide audience.²¹⁰ In this respect Mühsam's conception of revolutionary politics echoed that of many of the other artist-radicals who played such a significant role in Munich. It was in the work of another key participant in the Munich revolutions, the Expressionist playwright Ernst Toller, that we can see the merger of political and cultural radicalism most clearly; tellingly, he also argued for the importance of a radical politics of embodiment and subjectivity to any revolutionary movement.

Understanding Toller's work requires a brief introduction to Expressionism, a movement to which I will return at greater length in the next section of this chapter and in the next chapter. Expressionism was the leading modernist approach in a range of artistic fields, from visual art to literature and film, in Germany. In Munich and elsewhere, Expressionists were heavily involved in the cultural dimensions of the post-War revolutions.²¹¹ In Munich this involved the extensive production of posters, illustrations for newspapers, and other agitational materials, but the political orientation of Expressionists varied significantly. Some supported the SPD's calls for order, while others followed Landauer and Mühsam in seeing the revolutionary movements as an opportunity for artistic leadership and a possibility for abolishing the distinctions between art and society. Many held onto a quasi-religious vision of spiritual change that eschewed the more political demands of the revolution.

209 Mühsam 1921, p. 53. This essay was in part an attack on the arguments of *Proletkult*-oriented activists who advocated for a proletarian culture rooted in an idealised vision of the working class. Mühsam rejected the idea that intellectuals should 'rule', but was equally dismissive of the anti-intellectual class reductionism of the *Proletkult*.

210 Shepherd 1993, pp. 120–22.

211 Weinstein 1990 is the classic account of art and the revolutions in post-War Germany.

In this sense, Expressionist politics tended towards anarchism or anarcho-socialism, but often this took the form of a vague and individualist notion of transformation.

The Munich art journal *Der Weg* (*The Path*) was a key proponent of this view. Writing in the journal, the playwright and writer Otto Zareck proclaimed: '[o]ur path will be followed by all who believe in humanity. Perhaps this is the only revolutionary way of thinking: to believe in humanity'.²¹² 'Humanity', he contended, transcends politics and is expressed in art. Throughout the revolutionary period in Munich the journal promoted this utopian idea of a humanity beyond politics for whom 'there no longer exists any borders to divide the soul... the human is born to be a god!'²¹³

The participation of many Expressionists in the post-War struggles cemented the sense, especially for those on the right, that modernist art was synonymous with revolution. Not all Expressionists were radicals, however. The Munich art dealer Hans Goltz's publication *Der Ararat*, for example, initially took a more nationalist line, using articles and images to denounce what it described as the 'a-national' tendencies of the returning revolutionary soldiers, railing against the loss of German territories in the east (the lands being 'defended' by the *Freikorps* as well) and west, and against the imposition of terms by the victorious nations.²¹⁴ Whereas *Der Weg* responded to the final phases of the revolution and its violent suppression with an unspecific lament that subsumed political questions under an undifferentiated notion of 'terror',²¹⁵ *Der Ararat* argued much more concretely against communism and the revolution. An editorial in the 19 May 1919 issue contended that the revolutionary movements in Germany sought to impose the politics of a minority on a German people rendered apathetic by the hardships and deprivations of war. The unwillingness of the radicals to defend the nation 'was a crime against the German *Volk*'.²¹⁶ The danger came from the 'foul and degenerate'. 'We do not need any chattering councils, but rather constructive expert authorities'.²¹⁷ Expressionism, Goltz himself argued, could play a key role in the regeneration of national feeling, but this possibility was hindered rather than helped by the movement having been branded as 'revolutionary'.²¹⁸

²¹² Zareck 1919, p. 4.

²¹³ Heynicke 1919, p. 4.

²¹⁴ Goltz 1918, p. 2; Renatus 1919, pp. 3–4.

²¹⁵ Trautner 1919, pp. 4–6.

²¹⁶ *Der Ararat* 1919, p. 3.

²¹⁷ *Der Ararat* 1919, p. 2.

²¹⁸ Goltz 1919, p. 4.

This conservative Expressionism was an exception, but even amongst the majority who were sympathetic to the political left positions varied significantly. The overarching concerns of Expressionism were individual spiritual transformation and the integration of art and social life. To develop these claims, artists formed councils of their own modelled on those of workers, soldiers, and peasants. In Munich, the 'Council of Artists' brought together a number of currents arguing for reform in the art world and the expansion of art into everyday life. Eisner took up these demands in his 3 January 1919 address on art to the Provisional National Assembly, arguing for a new kind of art. 'In the present time and in the future it seems to me as if this flight into the realm of the beautiful should no longer be necessary, that art should no longer be an asylum for those who despair of life, but that life itself must be an artwork and the state the highest artwork'.²¹⁹ What this meant was much disputed; by early 1919 divisions within the Council had grown, with more radical artists seeking to go beyond the statist implications of Eisner's view.

These splits were developing even as, on the day of Eisner's murder, the Council of Artists was to be recognised as the official governmental art body. A dissenting group of artists formed the Action Committee of Revolutionary Artists, which Landauer turned to in developing his cultural policy. The Action Committee was anti-capitalist and included communists, anarchists, and some Christians. It espoused a radical democracy in which art was integrated into the revolutionary process. Many members shared Landauer's and Mühsam's opposition to the perceived centralism and economic determinism of communism, holding that the abolition of the distinction between art and life was central to a truly emancipatory politics.²²⁰ The Committee's leader Hans Richter, though, was close to the KPD, but he too argued: '[t]he intellectuality of an abstract art... means a tremendous expansion of humanity's feeling of freedom. The objective of our beliefs is a fraternal art: a new mission of humanity in community'.²²¹

For many artists, the revolutionary events presented the opportunity for a much wider circulation of their works. The woodcuts that were a hallmark of Expressionism appeared frequently in political publications and posters for various political tendencies. Typically these presented an ecstatic and quasi-religious outlook, a perspective rejected by the KPD. As Joan Weinstein argues, workers too tended to respond to Expressionist works with incomprehension and sometimes anger. The Action Committee thus saw an important part of

²¹⁹ Quoted in Weinstein 1990 p. 164.

²²⁰ Weinstein 1990, pp. 177–205.

²²¹ Quoted in Hoffmann 1998, p. 63.

their work as the development of an aesthetic sense amongst workers, presenting lectures and instruction designed to help the proletariat understand the new art; these initiatives met with limited success.²²² Whatever the transformative dreams of the artists may have been, modernist and avant-garde art rarely achieved a wide reach. As I will discuss later in this chapter and in subsequent ones, the question of political efficacy plagued not only Expressionism, but all forms of avant-garde art during the Weimar period, informing as well debates over aesthetics and politics on the left more broadly. Before turning to these debates, an examination of the most famous of the Munich artist-radicals, the playwright Ernst Toller, can illuminate how they played out in the context of the events in Munich.

Toller was one of the key exponents of the Expressionist idea of the artist-leader, but his work also achieved a success that was relatively rare. Indeed, as I will discuss in the sixth chapter, he contributed to the staging of mass plays for worker festivals during the 1920s, and proved much more able than most to bring his work to a working-class audience. His initial theatrical success came with his semi-autobiographical play *Transformation*. He had begun writing the play as he became politicised towards the end of the War. The play is especially interesting for the purposes of this chapter because it combined a rather naïve conception of the revolutionary potential of art with an often subtle and critical engagement with the politics of embodiment that he made central to his depiction of the dynamics of war and radical political praxis.

Toller, a German Jew born in 1893, came to his political radicalism relatively late, mirroring the trajectory of many other radical artists. His early life, like that of Friedrich, the protagonist of *Transformation*, was marked by a strong desire for national belonging. Growing up middle class and Jewish in the Prussian province of Posen (Poznań), which was ethnically and historically Polish, meant that he was consistently confronted by questions of identity. The outbreak of war in 1914 found him in France, and it affected him as it did many others. In his autobiography Toller describes returning to Germany and being given pictures of the Kaiser inscribed with his proclamation of the *Burgfrieden*, the 'social truce', and feeling this deeply as a moment of national integration.²²³ Driven by this patriotism, he immediately enlisted in the artillery. These feelings are expressed in his poem 'Spring 1915':

²²² Weinstein 1990, pp. 184–90.

²²³ Toller 1934, p. 53.

Never before have I felt how much I love you, Germany, as the magic of spring surrounds you in the heat of battle. In spring I go into battle, to victory or death. What do I care for the burden of my own troubles? Today I shall shatter them, laughing, to pieces.²²⁴

Toller's experience at the front undermined this patriotic fervour, laying bare for him the violence of war and the exclusionary nature of the national community. Violence against the 'enemy' on the front was combined with the virulent hostility shown towards Jews, political dissidents, and other non-conformists within Germany.²²⁵ Toller thus embraced pacifism by 1916. Soon after he 'converted' to Expressionism.²²⁶ By late 1917, as he began to develop a more systematic critique of those responsible for the War, he helped form a cultural-political 'Association of Youth in Germany' aiming 'to overcome the ever-widening gulf between the people and intellectuals through practical work'.²²⁷ After having been encouraged in his political work by Eisner, Toller participated in the January 1918 strikes in Munich's munitions industry. This experience grounded his vague sense of revolt in more concrete activism: introducing him to class politics and industrial action, and turning his attention to a critique of capitalism.²²⁸ He handed out selections from *Transformation* at protests,²²⁹ soon began to speak at marches, was then elected to a strike committee, and rapidly became a major figure in the movement.

The betrayal of the strikes by Auer and the SPD sharpened his belief in the revolutionary power of the general strike. Like Mühsam it also led Toller to support the principle of the *Einheitsfront* (the unified front of the left), a

224 Toller 2000b, p. 48.

225 His unease with the conduct of war began, he later recounted, with the virulence of anti-French, English and Russian propaganda. The real turning point came as he was digging in the trenches and his pick sank into a buried corpse. While he had seen many dead bodies before, in this case he suddenly realised that this was a man – not French or German, but a man. 'And suddenly, like light in darkness, the real truth broke in upon me; the simple fact of Man, which I had forgotten, which had lain deep buried and out of sight; the idea of community, of unity' (Toller 1934, pp. 78–79).

226 Expressionists more generally often followed Toller's trajectory of initial support for the War, followed by growing disillusionment, and then to more outright opposition (see Jelavich 1999, pp. 47–53).

227 'Leitsätze für einen kulturpolitischen Bund der Jugend in Deutschland', in Toller 1978, 1, p. 31.

228 Toller 1934, pp. 100–5.

229 'Bemerkungen zu meinem Drama "Die Wandlung"', in Toller 1978, 2, p. 360.

conviction he held onto throughout the Weimar years.²³⁰ His actions led to his arrest and incarceration in a military prison (where, he says, he read Marx, Engels, Lassalle, Bakunin, Mehring, Luxemburg, and the Webbs),²³¹ followed by a brief confinement in Emil Kraepelin's Psychiatric Clinic. (As noted earlier, Kraepelin, a leading radical nationalist activist in the city, was one of the most prominent German psychiatrists and theorists of degeneration, his institutional position giving the ability to confine radicals on medical grounds).²³² Toller's condition was diagnosed as 'hereditary degeneration', and doctor's notes described him as 'a neurasthenic with a pronounced sense of ego', a 'severe hysteric with an abnormal urge to make himself interesting'. He was released when it was concluded that he was 'clearly one of the politically immature, aestheticizing and hyper-sensitive young people, who live entirely in their ideas'.²³³ The continuity between the popular rhetorics of degeneration and their medical equivalents are clear here.

Toller's time in the clinic had a strong influence on his writing, evident in his plays *Transformation* and *Hinkemann*.²³⁴ Following his release he entered the revolutionary government, briefly leading the council republic.²³⁵ Influenced by Landauer, he took a resolutely pro-council, anti-parliamentary line. Torn by the incompatibility between his personal pacifism and his understanding of the likely necessity of violence in sustaining the revolution, he decided to accept the primacy of the collective struggle over his personal convictions and accept his election to the leadership of the Red Army in the final stages of the revolution.²³⁶ Following the victory of the counter-revolution Toller managed

230 Dove 1990, pp. 31–38.

231 Toller 1934, p. 112.

232 Geyer 1998, pp. 100–2. In his later account of his incarceration, he suggested that his confinement came at his family's instigation (Toller 1934, pp. 123–29).

233 Quoted in Dove 1990, pp. 47–48. The diagnosis of 'male hysteria' was deployed widely during the War, a question to which I will return in the following chapter (see Lerner 2003).

234 See Toller 1928 for his own account of his time in the clinic. I discuss *Hinkemann* in the next chapter.

235 Köglmeier 1999.

236 Toller 1934, pp. 174–75. These themes were later discussed in his 1930 play *Masses Man*, as well as in other writings. He argued that 'the struggle between Individual and Masses doesn't take place just in the external world, but that everyone in his inner depths is at the same time both Individual and Masses. As Individual he acts according to the moral ideas he recognises as right. He wants to live *them*, even if the world perishes by so doing. As Masses he is driven by social impulses and situations; he wants to achieve his *goal*, even if he must give up his moral ideas. Even now this contradiction is unresolvable for the politically active, and I wanted to show exactly this unresolvability' ('Arbeiten' [1930], in

to stay underground for several weeks, likely avoiding immediate execution. He was eventually arrested and tried on charges of treason in the midst of a wave of strong anti-Semitic fury directed by the radical right. Max Weber and Thomas Mann were amongst those who spoke in his defence, and his trial ended on 16 July 1919 with the relatively light (by comparison with others on the left, though not of course with those on the right) sentence of five years in prison.²³⁷ In his closing address to the court, Toller rejected the prosecution's diagnoses of alleged psychopathologies and a 'hysterical constitution'.²³⁸ He spoke in support of the revolution and gave a typically soaring and utopian reading of what was to come. Workers, he claimed, desired the satisfaction of material needs. 'But you will also find a great longing for art and culture, a profound struggle for spiritual liberation. This process has now begun and will not be suppressed through the bayonets and courts martial of the unified capitalist governments of the entire world'.²³⁹

Transformation was published and performed after his conviction. This led to calls for the release of this major new artist from around the world. They were effective, but while the government offered him early release, Toller refused unless all other political prisoners were also released, a condition that went unmet. He thus served the full five years of his sentence.²⁴⁰ The KPD supported his release, along with all of the other prisoners, but there remained a significant political gulf between their positions. His fellow political prisoner Ernst Niekisch, who had been active with the KPD, suggested that '[h]e was a man of feeling not cold calculation, with a sense of fantasy not facts. The situation pulled him along rather than him mastering it with a cold superiority'.²⁴¹ There is certainly something to this critique, but interesting here as well is the evocation of a kind of masculine hardness opposed to the effeminate and potentially degenerate flights imputed to Toller. Niekisch was in some ways not typical of the Party, later becoming a prominent exponent of national Bolshevism, but this gendered construction of politics was not uncommon.

Toller's individualistic and Expressionist-influenced conception of politics was evident in *Transformation*. The play was initially written in the summer and autumn of 1917 and the final draft completed in prison in February and March

Toller 1978, 1, p. 139). These themes were also evident in Mühsam's *Judas*, like *Masses Man* loosely based on the January 1918 strikes.

237 Dove 1990, pp. 88–93.

238 'Schlußwort vor dem Standgericht' in Toller 1978, 1, p. 49.

239 'Schlußwort vor dem Standgericht' in Toller 1978, 1, p. 51.

240 Haar 1981, p. 15.

241 Quoted in Köglmeier 1999, p. 44.

1918, when Toller was undergoing his profound political transformation.²⁴² While it was not staged until 30 September 1919, it was written in the context of the War and the strikes of early 1918 rather than the post-War revolutions. *Transformation* follows the artist Friedrich as he joins the military and, through a series of transformative moments, turns to pacifism and then radical politics. In Expressionist fashion, Friedrich's own personal transformation is intimately bound up with aesthetic and social transformation. This is especially evident in the culminating scenes of the play. A gathered crowd listens restlessly to a veteran, a professor, and a priest, each of whom justifies and glorifies the imperialist military prowess of the Fatherland. In response, a left-wing agitator calls on the crowd to march, his promise of bread through bloody struggles for freedom representing an inadequate, to Toller, materialist response. Friedrich, sounding much like Landauer, stands and denounces all, including the agitator who, he says, ignores the spiritual needs of the people. The play ends with the crowd finding their voice through Friedrich's ecstatic call for the spiritual transformation of humanity.²⁴³

Transformation suffers more than many of Toller's later plays from this voluntarist understanding of individual and social transformation, one that subsumes the contradictions and complexities explored in the play into the ecstatic unity of the artist-leader. Some critics, most notably Herbert Jhering in his review of the play's initial performance, identified the autobiographical nature of the play as a strength, giving the play – which he called a 'people's play [*Volksstück*]' – a depth that, for the first time, produced a theatrical Expressionism that was 'not experiment, but rather fulfilment'.²⁴⁴ Insofar as Jhering has its nostalgic conclusion of transformation and unification in mind, this is a rather optimistic reading. Still, the play proved to be a major success, giving Toller a theatrical status to match his political notoriety.

Despite its rather naïve culmination with a moment of spiritual transformation, the play's narrative is rather more complex and internally contradictory, a complexity that in many respects opens the play up to multiple readings. The narrative proceeds through several key stages, each of which involves Friedrich's transformation through concrete experiences. At each stage he moves further away from his initial patriotic fervour and investment in his masculine and

242 'Bemerkungen zu meinem Drama "Die Wandlung"', in Toller 1978, 2, p. 360.

243 'Transformation', in Toller 2000a, pp. 106–18. This scene of course suggests Toller's own recent (and successful) experience as a revolutionary orator in the January strikes. There are also strong Nietzschean and religious overtones here, a common set of themes in Expressionist drama (see Furness 1993, p. 169).

244 'Die Wandlung', in Jhering 1987, p. 36.

German identity. The action moves between dream-like sequences and reality, the narrative constructed through the interplay between, and ultimately the elision of, fantasy and reality. This allows Toller to explore the collective unconscious of the nation through a dialectics of nostalgia and shock that belies the unity expressed at the conclusion. From Friedrich's early desire for national belonging to his desire at the end for a people unified through a spiritual revolution, the nostalgic dream of wholeness is insistently fragmented, broken apart by the experiential shock of war and oppressive modernity. At the heart of this interplay lies the body; it is this dimension of the play, often missed by critics, that drives the dramatic and political tension and is *Transformation's* most significant contribution.

The first of Friedrich's transformations takes place in the context of war. Rather than the First World War, however, the action unfolds in an unnamed colonial war. This setting enables an explicit engagement with the racialised constitution of the nation. Friedrich had enlisted out of a desire to overcome his feelings of homelessness and rootlessness, seeking to gain access to a masculine German identity through imperialist war against 'savages' in Africa. Friedrich defends the War when some of his fellow soldiers question its value, arguing that it is crucial to the formation and defence of the Fatherland. The response from the soldiers both ruptures and restabilises this national body. 'In the end', they say, 'we are all without Fatherland. Like whores'.²⁴⁵ This claim of a universal homelessness is simultaneously retracted; the soldiers argue that Friedrich, as a Jew, is in any case not part of the Fatherland. The complex interplay between the gendered figure of the whore and the racialised Jew sets out the unstable boundaries of the nation. The male soldiers, comfortable in their intrinsic belonging, are free to take up and discard gendered and racialised subject positions in ways that are inaccessible to Friedrich, who must fight for his (impossible) inclusion in the nation.

The bodily implications of the racialised nation are amplified in the next scene, a dream sequence in which skeletons dangling on barbed wire discuss the war. Literally stripped of the skin that divided them, one skeleton proclaims: '[n]ow we are no more white and black'.²⁴⁶ This unity in death extends to gender, with one skeleton identifying herself as a girl who was murdered during a gang-rape. Upon finding out her gender, the other skeletons cover their genitals with their hands in a parody of bourgeois shame, but death abolishes such propriety as well. The scene ends with the first skeleton urging the rest to drop their hands, proclaiming equality again: '[y]ou have been raped... God, we too

²⁴⁵ 'Transformation', in Toller 2000a, p. 70.

²⁴⁶ 'Transformation', in Toller 2000a, p. 72.

have been raped.²⁴⁷ There is a troubling erasure of the specificity of gender-based violence in this comment, but despite turning rape into a metaphor the scene offers a powerful reading of the gendered and racialised practices that block the recognition of a common humanity. Universal belonging is accessible only in death.

Friedrich still perseveres in his desire for belonging. He volunteers with several others to go on a reconnaissance mission 'for the sake of the Fatherland'.²⁴⁸ We then find him in a military hospital, where, not for the first time, he dreams of Ahasuerus, the wandering Jew, and screams that he will not wander with him.²⁴⁹ He gradually comes to, learning that he had been captured by the enemy and found bound to a tree, the sole survivor of the mission. An officer comes to give him a medal:

OFFICER: I congratulate you, young friend. Bravely you risked your life in battle, regardless of the greatest torture. The Fatherland esteems your service most highly. Through me it presents you with the Cross. You were a stranger to our people, but now you have earned your civil rights.

FRIEDRICH: The Cross? Do I belong to you now?

OFFICER: You belong...

(Noise outside)

What's going on?

NURSE: *(Joyfully.)* With God's help we have beaten the enemy – ten thousand dead!

OFFICER: Yes, young friend... Victory sweeps our country, and you belong to the victors.

(FRIEDRICH alone)

FRIEDRICH: What jubilation dances in their faces. Ten thousand dead! Because of ten thousand dead I belong to them. Why don't I burst into laughter? Is this liberation? Are these great times? Are these great men? *(Eyes stare straight ahead) Now I belong to them.*²⁵⁰

Finally aware of the high price of belonging, Friedrich begins his transformation.

Friedrich's desire for belonging thus founders on the racist, imperialist, and – in the shape of the Cross – Christian bedrock of the nation. One of the play's

²⁴⁷ 'Transformation', in Toller 2000a, p. 75.

²⁴⁸ 'Transformation', in Toller 2000a, p. 71.

²⁴⁹ See Malkin 2010, pp. 152–53 for a discussion of Toller's use of Ahasuerus and questions of Jewish identity in the context of Expressionist drama.

²⁵⁰ 'Transformation', in Toller 2000a, pp. 77–78.

virtues, though, is that these transformations do not come easily: the density of national identities and the desire for belonging are depicted as highly resistant to change, and Friedrich continues to struggle. His next transformation takes place over the aesthetic and gendered ways that the nation is embodied. Stymied in war, Friedrich desperately tries to (re)constitute his and the nation's identity in stone. He toils for a year on a sculpture of a brutal, larger than life, very muscular and naked man with his fists raised – a work he calls 'Victory of the Fatherland'. The stone refuses to yield. Friedrich does not want a memorial, but rather a statue that will inspire men to defend their fatherland. But, '[t]here's a gaping contradiction there – Why can't I seem to succeed . . . The task is always just as big . . . Am I too small to give it artistic form? . . . Can't I pierce the iron armour? Is the armour all too hard?'²⁵¹ Friedrich thus seeks to constitute the national body as an aesthetic unity, but the material proves unyielding. The sculpture gestures toward the desire for a nostalgic aesthetic unity of the *Volkskörper* that we have encountered before, as well as its masculine form. The body is stone not steel, but its impenetrable masculine hardness suggests the militarised body of the radical right we saw in the previous chapter, and that Benjamin argued was at the heart of the counter-revolutionary project.

The complexity of the gendered construction of the nation is developed in Friedrich's encounters with three women that end his sculptural attempts to embody his national subjectivity. First his lover, Gabriele, comes to his studio and informs him that she is leaving him because her German father would renounce her if she married him, a Jew. She is torn, she says, but cannot escape the pull of patriarchal and *völkisch* values.

[M]y father keeps possession of my native soil. From which he wants to expel me. I could never enter it again, never see it again. The native soil I cling to with all my childhood dreams, that I'm rooted in with all my lifeblood. I struggled over it for many days and nights. And today I found clarity. I cannot give it up.²⁵²

The patriarchal nation closes its borders to Friedrich, leaving him shaken. Nevertheless, he perseveres with 'Victory of the Fatherland' in the vain hope of producing the German national body.

Friedrich's project breaks down entirely with the entry of a second woman covered in syphilitic sores who comes begging at his door. It is here that class

²⁵¹ 'Transformation', in Toller 2000a, p. 86.

²⁵² 'Transformation', in Toller 2000a, p. 88.

politics are injected into the narrative for the first time.²⁵³ Rather than racial difference, the nation is depicted as riven by inequality. She tells how she contracted the disease in the colonial war in which Friedrich fought, to which he responds that it was a necessary war to defend the Fatherland. 'For your Fatherland!' she responds sarcastically.

For the rich few who gorge and guzzle, gorge and guzzle and suck us dry, who gamble fast and loose with the profits of our labour. Oh how I hate them, these henchmen. I know them well; I was even one of them once.²⁵⁴

Her husband, from whom she contracted syphilis, then comes in and Friedrich recognises him as a fellow soldier from the war. This syphilitic woman and her husband, who is rendered completely incoherent by the infection, bring Friedrich to the breaking point. The boundaries that Friedrich is desperately trying to maintain collapse under the weight of these German victims of the War – the defence of the Fatherland is exposed as a prop for the games of the rich. Friedrich is not innocent in this respect, his bourgeois anxieties punctured by the woman's sarcastic response: '[w]ell, have you had your little drama, sir? Can we go away now?'²⁵⁵

Friedrich's response again invokes the prostitute as a marker of degeneration, making explicit the link so often made between disease and sex work.

Deformed speech! Deformed men!... For the sake of the Fatherland... God... can a Fatherland demand so much? Or has the Fatherland sold itself out to the State? And the State speculates with it in dirty business deals? Is the State a pimp and the Fatherland a trampled whore who sells herself to every brutal lust? Invested with the blessing of the procuress Church? Can a Fatherland which demands so much be holy? Worth the sacrifice of a single soul? No, a thousand times no. I'd rather wander, restlessly wander, with you, Ahasuerus!²⁵⁶

With this reclaiming of his Jewish identity, he takes up a hammer and smashes 'Victory of the Fatherland', and then gets a revolver to end his own life. However,

253 Dove argues that the earlier scenes were likely written in summer 1917, while this section came in autumn 1917 as Toller himself became more attuned to class politics (see Dove 1986, pp. 65–66).

254 'Transformation', in Toller 2000a, p. 89.

255 'Transformation', in Toller 2000a, p. 90.

256 'Transformation', in Toller 2000a, pp. 90–91.

a third woman, his sister, enters and takes him the rest of the way through his transformation:

FRIEDRICH: My way is blocked.

SISTER: Your way leads upwards.

FRIEDRICH: Back to mother?

SISTER: Higher, but also to mother.

FRIEDRICH: Back to Fatherland?

SISTER: Higher, but also to your land.

FRIEDRICH: I cannot see it, I am dazzled.

SISTER: Let me shield your eyes and you will see. Your way leads you to God...

To God who is spirit and love and strength,

To God who dwells in mankind.

Your way leads you to humanity.²⁵⁷

At this, Friedrich's eyes are opened, and he finds his new calling. He becomes Ahasuerus, and, as I described earlier, goes out to the people in order that his individual transformation can spark social change.²⁵⁸

The stages of Friedrich's transformation highlight the gendered nature of the nation, but also reproduce conventional narrative forms in which women serve almost exclusively as mediums for the masculine refashioning of the hero. The syphilitic woman provides an interesting exception, however, her caustic final comment deflating the otherwise messianic trajectory of the play, proclaiming it merely as his 'little drama'. This moment, along with other similar ones, is significant in that it works to undermine the desire for a nostalgic unity that animates the play. Toller seems to almost sabotage the narrative closure of the play's end. The moment of transcendence rings false, the 'failed' bodies and subjectivities, and the sense of fragmentation insistently re-emerge. This tendency became more evident and more directly political in his later work. As Frank Trommler argues, 'Toller insisted on the paradigmatic and even redeeming role of the individual in his *failure* vis-à-vis political forces.'²⁵⁹

In the next chapter, I will trace some of the ways in which 'failed' bodies and subjectivities were deployed in the modernist and avant-garde cultural

²⁵⁷ 'Transformation', in Toller 2000a, p. 92.

²⁵⁸ Ossar 1980, pp. 73–74 argues that Toller distinguishes clearly in this respect between the false unity of the *Volk* and the true anarchist community, a position that brings him close to Landauer.

²⁵⁹ Trommler 1990, p. x. See also Trommler 1992, pp. 60–75.

production of the Weimar period. Few writers and artists gave as nuanced a critique of the nostalgia for bodily wholeness as Toller. Indeed, his work offers a profound analysis of the idea of the *Volkskörper* that animated the militarist desire that emerged out of the experience of the War. A dream sequence following Friedrich's own stay in the hospital brings out this critical dimension most explicitly. Here we are presented with a professor, the representative of the medical disciplinary institutions of the state, surveying a vast room of maimed soldiers. Seven 'specimens', each with a common war injury, parade the professor's artificial limbs in a demonstration of his prowess.²⁶⁰ The priest and nurses present can do nothing for them, the priest even recognising the failure of his religion in the face of such suffering. The professor, however, is unperturbed, sustained by his seamless integration into the militarised mechanisms of the modern state. The medical establishment, he proclaims, is the hidden force that underpins the state, stitching together the unity shattered by war:

Yes, gentlemen.
 We are armed against all horrors here.
 We could call ourselves the positive branch,
 The armaments industry is the negative one.
 In other words: we are agents of synthesis,
 The armaments industry proceeds by analysis –
 All its chemists and engineers
 Are calmly willing to forge new weapons
 And manufacture unheard-of gases
 And we keep up.
 Their service to war will be credited to them
 But we, gentlemen, are satisfied,
 And modestly so, with this:
 The work of salvation is the doctor's job.²⁶¹

Set against Friedrich's own transformations in the hospital, this passage makes clear the extent to which the medicalised practices of managing bodies intersects with and sustains the horrors of imperialist and racist war. The body as the locus of destruction and rehabilitation was, as we shall see in the next chapter, fundamental to the medical practices of war in the Weimar period.

260 These include a blind soldier, one who has lost his arms, another with a spinal injury, one with shell shock, and one poisoned by gas.

261 'Transformation', in Toller 2000a, pp. 78–79.

Toller's new religion of humanity is supposed to act against this rationalised salvation but the irreducibly conflicted and ambivalent nature of forms of embodiment and subjectivity militate consistently against such closure.²⁶² In this sense, Toller offered a conception of revolutionary transformation that not only opened up radical politics to multiple forms of difference and oppression, but that was also carefully attuned to the material practices of eugenics and social hygiene that so profoundly shaped the culture and politics of the War and the Weimar period.

3.4 Expressionism and After

Expressionism has come to be seen as the quintessentially German form of modernism. Unlike Dada, which developed out of transnational networks of artists and provocateurs, Expressionism was inscribed in an explicitly national context. Toller's *Transformation* developed a profound critique of the nation, but other Expressionist artists and writers affirmed a national identity and aesthetic, a national(ist) reading often reinforced in subsequent histories of the movement.²⁶³ This national orientation was exploited by art dealers and critics – most notably Herwarth Walden in his *Der Sturm* gallery and journal – to promote the movement.²⁶⁴ Because the movement was less directly political than Dada, and even encompassed some conservative positions, it was more easily assimilable to a national-cultural heritage.²⁶⁵ Yet conservative cultural critics, especially those at the time, generally viewed Expressionism as a symptom of aesthetic and political degeneracy.

Because of its prominence, Expressionism was implicated in a broad range of aesthetic and political debates. Expressionism acted as the foil for Dadaist

262 Dove 1986, pp. 1–6 stresses this ambivalence as well, although not directly in relation to embodiment.

263 Lasko exemplifies this uncritical use of the nation, defining Expressionism as including 'all art in Germany from early in the twentieth century until shortly after the First World War, and for some artists beyond' (2003, p. 1). It is clear from the context that he means all modernist art; nevertheless, aesthetic criteria come a distant second to the geographical. For a critique of the national reading of Expressionism, see Rumold 2002, pp. 7–9.

264 West 2000, pp. 84–85. These tendencies varied, with the *Brücke* group, founded in 1906, configuring itself in national terms, but the Munich-based *Blaue Reiter*, founded in 1911, more internationalist in orientation (West 2000, pp. 67–69; Lloyd 1991a, pp. 130–38).

265 In some respects, though, this national reading of the movement was a later imposition, a product of the West German appropriation of Expressionism as a foundational cultural movement for the post-World War II state.

and other avant-garde movements that followed, and was a frequent touchstone in debates on the left, culminating in the famous Expressionism debates of the 1930s. It is through those later debates that the movement's place in Marxist conceptions of aesthetics and politics were cemented, with the question of totality central. But, as I will show, these arguments had their roots in the struggles of the early Weimar years. Furthermore, the centrality of the politics of embodiment to questions of aesthetics and politics is missing from many later analyses of these debates, a lack that I have addressed in the case of Toller's *Transformation*. In Dada and other modernist and avant-garde art of the period bodies likewise emerged frequently as the medium for critical representations of the fragmenting and alienating character of capitalist modernity. Bringing these two themes together, I will argue in the remainder of the chapter that Marxist debates over aesthetics and politics need to be read in relation to questions of embodiment.

Expressionism's upsurge in the immediate post-War period represented its last gasp, especially in terms of visual art. In many respects, the Expressionist project collapsed as the experiences of war and revolution sharpened the contradictions within the movement. These contradictions can be characterised using Peter Bürger's influential analysis of modernism and the avant-garde.²⁶⁶ In *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, Bürger argues that modernism marked a retreat from social engagement and a desire to sustain the autonomy of art. Modernist radicalism is thus asocial: 'aesthetic experience is the positive side of that process by which the social subsystem "art" defines itself as a distinct sphere. Its negative side is the artist's loss of any social function.'²⁶⁷ Avant-garde art, on the other hand, seeks to re-establish these social connections by critiquing the institutional structures that maintain art as autonomous, thus attempting to recover a social function for art. Modernism's critical practice is thus radicalised and socialised: 'with the historical avant-garde movements, the social subsystem that is art enters the stage of self-criticism'.²⁶⁸ Andreas Huyssen takes this argument a step further, contending that the avant-garde's politicisation involved an engagement with mass culture subsequently ignored in the post-1945 depoliticisation and canonisation of the avant-garde by art history and theory.²⁶⁹

The context of the Munich revolutions shows that, in the case of Expressionism, the dichotomy between modernism and avant-garde was not clear-cut.

266 Bürger 1984. See also Lloyd 1991a for the application of Bürger's argument to Expressionism.

267 Bürger 1984, p. 33.

268 Bürger 1984, p. 22.

269 Huyssen 1986, pp. 3–4.

Many Expressionists held on to a modernist notion of art as a separate sphere, even when seeing artists as a kind of social vanguard. Read in Bürger's terms, Expressionism thus straddled the modernism/avant-garde divide. For Raymond Williams, this ambivalence in fact represented a temporal and political paradox at the heart of modernism's anti-bourgeois stance more broadly. 'In remaining anti-bourgeois, its [modernism's] representatives chose the formerly aristocratic valuation of art as a sacred realm above money and commerce, or the revolutionary doctrines, promulgated since 1848, of art as the liberating vanguard of popular consciousness'.²⁷⁰ In rejecting bourgeois aesthetic practice, modernism could thus look forward or backward. It was these two movements in modernism, the turn to either autonomous or committed art, that Adorno subsequently rejected; for him, only a truly negative aesthetics could gesture towards these impossible dreams.²⁷¹

If Expressionism was an ambivalent movement according to Bürger's account, the avant-garde in the Weimar period was represented more directly by Dada. In Dada, the spiritual values of art promoted by Expressionism were profaned, and art's autonomy was abolished through what Benjamin, writing in this case of Dada's heir Surrealism, called a 'profane illumination'.²⁷² Surrealism in this respect embodied a similar aesthetic to Dada, and in describing Breton's work, Benjamin gives an account that prefigures Bürger's: 'Breton declared his intention of breaking with a praxis that presents the public with the literary precipitate of a certain form of existence while withholding that existence itself'.²⁷³ This was a challenge that Benjamin endorsed, albeit with reservations. Benjamin's aesthetic theory thus shared the rejection of an affirmative art with Adorno's, but with a crucial distinction. He maintained the possibility of a revolutionary art, linking avant-garde artistic practice to the working-class movement.

As I argued earlier, Benjamin's conception of a revolutionary aesthetics was rooted in the body. We encountered an even more forceful statement of this bodily aesthetics in Bakhtin's notion of the carnivalesque discussed in the introduction to the book. Bakhtin saw the carnival as the expression of a *popular* culture whose social bases were under attack. Such a popular culture

270 Williams 1989, p. 34. He traces three stages in this process: artistic innovation within established art markets and academies; innovation that sought to establish alternative forms of production and distribution; and full-blown attacks on cultural establishments and the social order (pp. 50–51).

271 Adorno 1982a.

272 'Surrealism', in Benjamin 1999b, p. 217.

273 'Surrealism', in Benjamin 1999b, pp. 207–8.

was no longer possible in the contemporary world, he argued, but a faint echo of these earlier subversive forms of expression nevertheless remained in the contemporary avant-garde. Bakhtin's nostalgia for a lost popular radicalism was thus similar to Benjamin's longing for storytelling, a strategic nostalgia intended not to produce a desire for return, but to disrupt notions of artistic or social progress.

Bakhtin's work is significant here given the prominence of shocking imagery produced by the avant-garde, with the grotesque body especially prominent in Dadaist and other avant-garde works. However, to read the avant-garde solely in terms of shock is to miss the extent to which nostalgic moments profoundly shaped their work. The dialectic of nostalgia and shock that I have explored in this chapter emerged frequently in their work as well, with varying political implications. Dada, I will argue, was deeply marked by a desire for an unmediated access to a pure creative substratum that, they felt, was increasingly lost in the fragmenting and alienating processes of modern life.

The most powerful and fraught locus of this nostalgic desire in modernist and avant-garde cultural production was the primitive. Primitivist desires ran through the culture of the period. The influential critic Wilhelm Worringer's 1908 book, *Abstraction and Empathy*, is often read as an early example of Expressionist art history and theory, and there he stresses the primitivist nature of modernist art. Later, in 1919, he argued that Expressionism was

a heroic final gesture by art, as the last great convulsion before its abdication. Perhaps in this way art reared up for the last time, searching for the last expressive possibilities with desperate gestures, for its last build-up of power, this moment at which art took a deep breath and resorted to the extreme of primitivism.²⁷⁴

Worringer's influence was significant, with Benjamin's *Origin of German Tragic Drama* one of many works that bore traces of his arguments. Both were also influenced by Simmel.²⁷⁵ Indeed, Worringer's foreword to the 1948 edition of the book describes how a fleeting encounter with Simmel at the Trocadéro (where the former was researching 'primitive' art) inspired the book's ideas.²⁷⁶

274 Worringer, 'Kritische Gedanken zur neuen Kunst', in Barron and Dube 1997, p. 343.

275 Jennings provides an interesting account of these influences, although in arguing that Simmel 'builds on Marx's ideas' (1995, p. 92) in his theories of money and urban life he tends to miss the important differences between Marx and Simmel, and hence Worringer and Benjamin.

276 Worringer 1997, pp. xv–xxi.

Abstraction and Empathy argued against an aesthetics and art history that had Classical art as an ideal and that saw art solely in terms of naturalistic imitation and empathy. In contrast, Worringer argued that naturalism is one pole of artistic volition, while the other is abstraction. The crystalline and geometrical art of abstraction emerges out of very different concerns: '[w]hereas the precondition for the urge to empathy is a happy pantheistic relationship of confidence between man and the phenomena of the external world, the urge to abstraction is the outcome of a great inner unrest inspired in man by the phenomena of the outside world . . . We might describe this state as an immense spiritual dread of space'.²⁷⁷ This dread characterised primitive cultures and the cultures of the Orient, he argued, but also reflected the experience of the modern artist faced with the destabilising and fragmenting flux of contemporary life. It was this primitivist moment that Worringer later associated explicitly with Expressionism.

The primitivist desire expressed a complex and conflicted nostalgia for wholeness whose political implications were by no means straightforward. Expressionist primitivism, as Jill Lloyd suggests, gave artists 'a means of negotiating the internal paradox of modernity, of spanning between its positive and negative, its forward- and backward-looking tendencies'.²⁷⁸ That modernist and avant-garde primitivism looked to the racialised bodies of colonial subjects for inspiration was the most significant problem generated by this tendency, a point I will develop at greater length in the next chapter. Yet primitivist tropes encompassed various forms of bodily and subjective difference. The persona of the 'Wildman', as Louis Sass calls it, was taken up by many avant-garde artists who drew on visions of the 'savage' as well as ideas of madness in performing their own subversive genius.²⁷⁹ Childhood was a further source of 'primitive' energy on which modernist and avant-garde artists drew, with the child linked to the primitive through Ernst Haeckel's influential view that ontogeny (individual development) recapitulated phylogeny (the development of the species).²⁸⁰

277 Worringer 1997, pp. 14–15.

278 Lloyd 1991a, p. vii. For an interpretation of Expressionism that tends to repeat the primitivist move, arguing that the 'primitive' in fact does represent a universal substratum of all societies, see Pan 2001.

279 Sass 1992, pp. 21–23. Sass argues that this tradition continued in the work of Deleuze and Guattari and others who used schizophrenia as a lens through which to interpret capitalist modernity. This was one troubling practice that was evident in the Weimar period as well, and that I will take up in the next chapter.

280 For a critical history of this approach, see Gould 1977.

Running through this primitivist impulse was a search for bodily immediacy as a medium for transcendence. Most commonly, the bodies of savages, the mad, and others were interpellated as mediums for the constitution of a European 'new man'. As Barbara Wright points out, Expressionist journals, including politically engaged ones such as *Die Aktion*, consistently configured the quest for spiritual transformation through a misogynist reassertion of masculinity rooted in naturalised conceptions of gender.²⁸¹ This 'new man' thus found its aesthetic opposite in the effeminacy of Impressionism and *Jugendstil* (Art Nouveau). The Bohemian opposition to bourgeois morality and sexual norms celebrated by these artists was also configured almost exclusively in terms of *male* sexual liberation, with Mühsam, as we saw earlier, a rare exception in this respect. Wright suggests that while Expressionist artists were concerned with subverting ideologies of the family and sexual discipline, their progressive political positions promoting the decriminalisation of abortion, divorce, and a rejection of notions of 'illegitimate' children often did not extend to support for political equality. Thus, there was rarely a focus on liberating women 'from anything that prevents her from being *exclusively* identified with sexual functions'.²⁸² More profound challenges to bourgeois gender relations came primarily from women artists such as Hannah Höch.²⁸³

Raymond Williams' assertion – which was mentioned in the last chapter – that a misogynist 'critique and rejection of all social forms of human reproduction' ran through the gender politics of the avant-garde,²⁸⁴ is borne out here. Women's bodies tended to be configured as a medium for male artistic transformation and transcendence.²⁸⁵ This gendered difference supplemented and sustained the primitivist desire; in untrammelled sexuality, mediated through the sexualised female body, the male artist-radical could tap into a pure primal creativity. Expressionists thus tended to be highly ambivalent in their relationship with bourgeois morality and notions of *Bildung*:²⁸⁶ they rejected its repressive character, but held on to a sense of cultural regeneration that,

281 Wright 1987.

282 Wright 1987, p. 597. Dohm 1911 was a rare early exception of a woman writing in *Die Aktion* against these biologically deterministic notions of gender.

283 Makela 2007.

284 Williams 1989, p. 57.

285 Brinker-Gabler 2000, pp. 23–36 draws out some of the links between the primitive and woman in Expressionist writing. Straughn 2003, pp. 53–62 looks at issues of identity, in particular in relation to gender and primitivism, in pre-War Expressionist portraiture.

286 As noted in the first chapter, *Bildung* is a particularly German notion of bourgeois development that encompasses education in the broadest sense, a cultural, spiritual, and intellectual pedagogy cultivating bourgeois subjectivities.

especially in its desire for a masculine self-rebirthing, was not unlike the bourgeois ideal. This sense of regeneration sometimes implied an almost hygienic aesthetics. This can be seen in Wassily Kandinsky's influential pre-War writings. He focused on spiritual renewal, and argued that spirit, so central to notions of *Bildung*, represented the 'what' of a period, the genuine 'artistic substance, the soul of art, without which the body (i.e., the "how") can never be healthy, whether an individual or a whole people. *This "what" is the substance which only art can comprise, which only art can clearly express by those means of expression that are proper to it.*²⁸⁷ The vision of embodied unity that Kandinsky puts forward here – including his linking of the individual and collective body and his stress on 'health' – draws very clearly on ideas of the *Volkskörper*. While he challenges the repressive nature of bourgeois culture, his primitivism is arguably simply a radicalised form of *Bildung*.

In many respects Expressionism can be seen more as a movement for spiritual renewal than as a coherent artistic school or aesthetic practice. The movement is certainly famous for a number of stylistic characteristics, from the use of woodcuts to the prevalence of strong, jagged lines. Yet as Iwan Goll pointed out in 1921 while proclaiming the death of the movement, 'the whole of Expressionism (1910–1920) was not an art form, but rather the name of an *attitude*. It was more the content of a *Weltanschauung* than the object of an artistic requirement'.²⁸⁸ Indeed, many Expressionists formed or joined alternative communities to develop new forms of life. The colony in Ascona, Switzerland – inspired by Otto Gross' radical anti-bourgeois theories of sexuality as well as the experience of the Paris Commune – was the most notable. Its visitors included Mühsam and Marianne and Max Weber.²⁸⁹

The desire for a transformed life was also evident in Expressionist attempts to produce the work of art as an organic totality. While many argued that, especially in light of the War, the time for this nostalgic desire had passed, supporters continued to claim that the dream of an organic totality was the mark of all true art. Writing in this vein, Adolf Behne contended that art itself is nothing more 'than the crystalisation in a beautiful object of the sum total of the best, final, and definitive in humanity ... Art is not a question of form, but rather a way of thinking'.²⁹⁰ In Behne's statement we can see the extent to which Expressionism straddled Bürger's dichotomy between modernism

287 Kandinsky 1947, p. 29.

288 Goll, 'Der Expressionismus stirbt', in Anz and Stark 1981, p. 108.

289 Green 1986; Mühsam 1982. Gerhart Hauptman's 1918 novel *The Heretic of Soana*, which sold widely in the first years of the Weimar Republic, was also based on Ascona.

290 Behne 1919, p. 7.

and the avant-garde, seeking to integrate art with life while also retaining its autonomous status. In many respects, as we shall see in the next chapter, the War's destructive violence undermined faith that such a unity was possible, producing not an integrated Expressionist *Volkskörper*, but one marked by the impossibility of the unifying moment.

The nostalgic primitivist moment in Expressionism was always constituted in relation to a fascination with urban modernity.²⁹¹ Urban life was generally configured through abstract evocations of speed and chaos. Modern alienation tended to be conceived as a naturalised existential quality of the human condition rather than a product of social relations. Thus, for Behne, modern life provoked a new naturalism, 'a naturalism of inner life, a kind of psychography'.²⁹² This psychographic tendency was strongly evident in Ludwig Meidner's explosive pre-War canvases of the city. Meidner drew on Expressionist themes of modernity as fragmentary and shocking in reading the city as an *Apocalyptic Landscape*, a title he gave to several of his paintings. However, while drawing on an Expressionist aesthetic, Meidner rejected the nostalgic primitivism that characterised the movement more broadly.

Meidner's studio in pre-war Berlin attracted a number of artists that I will look at in later chapters, including Conrad Felixmüller and George Grosz, who shared Meidner's fascination with the power of the modern city.²⁹³ In his *Apocalyptic Landscape* canvases, Meidner depicts the city as resolutely anti-natural; designating the urban scenes as landscapes suggests an ironic stance, a reading of the city as a 'new nature'. Influenced by Futurism, he argued in 1914 that '[t]he time has come at last to start painting our real homeland, the metropolis that we all love so much'. The experience of the metropolis is fundamentally new, he continues,

a bombardment of whizzing rows of windows, of screeching lights between vehicles of all kinds and a thousand jumping spheres, scraps of

291 Paulsen 1987, pp. 149–53. Roters and Schultz 1987 offers a rich collection that highlights the centrality of the urban to these developments in Expressionist art.

292 Behne 1919, p17. The extent to which the transformative power of modernity was recognised varied significantly. Rumold 2002, pp. 10–14, for example, distinguishes between some of the poetry of Johannes Becher, who tends to cling to the hope of a stable, unified subject in the face of urban fragmentation, and Georg Heym, whose 'vision brings to view an *awareness* that the vast materialism of modernity transcends individual consciousness and understanding' (p. 11). Significantly, after his Expressionist phase, Becher went on to become the most prominent exponent of a communist proletarian literature, which produced its own stable subject in the revolutionary male worker.

293 Lloyd 1991a, pp. 85–86; Lloyd 1991b.

human beings, advertising signs, and shapeless colors . . . the wild streets, the elegance of iron suspension bridges, gas tanks that hang in white-cloud mountains, the roaring colors of buses and express locomotives, the rushing telephone wires (aren't they like music?), the harlequinade of advertising pillars, and then night . . . big city night . . .²⁹⁴

Thus, as David Frisby argues, Meidner painted from the perspective of a spectator in the crowd rather than from the classically modernist 'outside' perspective taken by Baudelaire's *flâneur*.²⁹⁵ In this respect, he represented an Expressionism tending towards avant-garde engagement, his canvases producing a conception of metropolitan subjectivity that, like in Simmel's account, generates a protective organ cushioning against shock. Despite his rootedness in the landscape of the city, Meidner held on to an extent to the Expressionist desire for spiritual renewal, with this perspective surviving even his turn to communism in the aftermath of the War.²⁹⁶

As noted earlier, only a minority of Expressionists followed Meidner in his turn to communism, although the experience of the War and its aftermath proved transformative for most.²⁹⁷ Expressionist work tended to become more cynical, with the violence of the front a 'new nature' that in turn inflected their reading of the city.²⁹⁸ Violence took on more explicitly bodily characteristics, with Expressionist and post-Expressionist artists focusing increasingly on the material body as a vehicle for their critical practices, a tendency that will be explored in the next chapter. It was the political challenge posed by the growing waves of protest and the emergence of revolutionary movements in the post-War period that forced artists to stake out a concrete political position, however, and to confront the challenge of developing an aesthetic adequate to those struggles.

The artists' councils mentioned earlier played a key role in these political developments. The different tendencies at work in the immediate post-

294 Meidner, 'An Introduction to Painting the Metropolis', in Long 1993, pp. 101–4.

295 Frisby 1993, p. 90.

296 We can see this at play in his lament at the murder of Luxemburg and Liebknecht, for example (see Meidner 1919).

297 Hume discusses the wartime shifts (2003, pp. 77–93). Eberle (1985) traces the impact of war on the art of four key Weimar artists, Dix, Grosz, Beckmann, and Schlemmer. Rumold and Werckmeister focus on artists' responses to war in relation to the occupation of Belgium (1990).

298 Gilbert 2000, pp. vii–xv argues that the influence of the front was evident throughout European culture during and after the War, conceived of as a sort of chaotic and violent city.

War years were reflected in the two main groups that formed in Berlin: the *Arbeitsrat für Kunst* and the *Novembergruppe*. The former – which included many members who later participated in the Bauhaus – invoked an ecstatic evocation of a new order cemented through art. As their programme from late 1918 argued:

Above all, this **slogan** guides us: Art and people must form a unity. Art should no longer be the pleasure of a few but should bring joy and sustenance to the masses. The goal is the union of the arts under the wings of a great architecture. From now on the artist, as shaper of the sensibilities of the people, is alone responsible for the external appearance of the new nation. He must determine the boundaries of form from statuary down to coins and stamps.²⁹⁹

The *Arbeitsrat* stood to the left of the SPD. Yet their relationship with the KPD and working-class audiences was fraught, with the group finding it difficult to be seen as a legitimate force in both political and aesthetic terms. Wealthier patrons and buyers often remained their primary source of income and audience.³⁰⁰

The *Novembergruppe* was the other major Expressionist group. While their membership overlapped to a certain extent with the *Arbeitsrat*, the group was dominated by SPD supporters. This meant that it took the position that the revolution had done its job in founding the Republic and lent their support to the government's attempts to secure 'order'. Artists in the group, like the strongly anti-Spartacist Max Pechstein, produced posters at the behest of the new government urging people to give up on more radical demands and return to work. 'Order' was the constant refrain. However, like other Expressionist works, Pechstein's posters proved no more successful with working-class audiences.³⁰¹ Like the *Arbeitsrat*, the *Novembergruppe* strove to bring art to

299 'Arbeitsrat für Kunst program', in Long 1993, p. 193. The programme was most likely the work of Bruno Taut, although it was signed by over 50 artists and architects.

300 Weinstein 1990, pp. 62–84.

301 Hans Friedenberger, 'The Artists' Posters of the Revolutionary Days', in Long 1993, pp. 188–90 discusses the lack of success of these posters, mentioning workers' resistance to Pechstein's images specifically. A 23 November 1918 letter from Georg Tappert, a member of both the *Novembergruppe* and, later, the *Arbeitsrat für Kunst*, to *Die Aktion* editor Franz Pfemfert highlights the anxiety felt by many artists wishing to support the revolution, but reluctant to subordinate their art to the new demands. He shifts the blame to workers themselves, nostalgically looking back to the 'proletarian youth of 1900' who, he claims, had 'an eagerness for literature, for art, for education... The young proletarian

the people, but they had ‘the moral reconstruction of a new, free Germany’ as their goal.³⁰² Their belief in revolution was thus limited to this moral and aesthetic shift, an approach denounced in an open letter from radical artists – many associated with Dada and with Wieland Herzfelde’s Malik-Verlag – who accused the *Novembergruppe* of collusion with a government that was in the back pocket of reactionary forces.³⁰³

While many Expressionists claimed an identity between their art and socialism, this position was often supported by assertion rather than any systemic critique. The critic Herbert Kühn, for instance, held that Expressionism and socialism were profoundly connected: ‘[w]ithout socialism there is no Expressionism.’³⁰⁴ But this connection was not found in material social relations – in fact, he argued that it was an opposition to materialism that linked the two movements. Spiritual loss, not working-class alienation, gave rise to the desire for revolution. This can be seen in Kühn’s historical argument that since the Renaissance, there had been a gradual loss of authentic Being under the influence of technology and the machine. While he speaks of capital, he tends to mean technology. The War represented the final stage in a process in which the spiritual is killed by the machine, but it has also thereby brought about the possibility of renewal. ‘Today we do not have socialism. Today we stand before the shared enemy: Capital – but the time will come when the spirit returns (for the spirit cannot be defeated by bayonets), the time will come when the last walls will fall, the time will come when all hearts will cry out loudly: Humanity!’³⁰⁵

In these comments we again see the emphasis on spiritual renewal common to the Expressionist movement. This renewal did not have to come from a return to a past organic unity. Iwan Goll even argued that the new technologically mediated social order embodied a regenerative communist potential. Expressionism offered a vision of a future in which art had merged with life. ‘The street pulls the artist into the ebb and flow of life [*die Brandungen des*

of today does this no more. Class consciousness, political enlightenment hold him back; because he cannot sit in the orchestra stalls, he forgoes it completely’ (in Long 1993, p. 182).

302 The passage is from a 1918 draft for the *Novembergruppe* manifesto, in Long 1993, p. 212.

303 ‘Open Letter to the Novembergruppe’ in Long 1993, pp. 219–21. The signatories included Otto Dix, George Grosz, Raul Hausmann and Hannah Höch, a number of whom had themselves exhibited with the *Novembergruppe*.

304 Kühn 1919, p. 29. Although Kühn was associated with the more radical *Die Aktion*, the *Neue Blätter für Kunst und Dichtung* in which this article appeared was an SPD-oriented journal emphasising social reconciliation. On the journal, see Weinstein 1990, pp. 117–19.

305 Kühn 1919, p. 30.

Lebens], the street of electricity, of buses, the cosmopolitan street of everyday life, the communist street'.³⁰⁶

The 1919 collection *The Spirit of the New Community: A Reminder to the German People* (*Der Geist der neuen Gemeinschaft: Eine Denkschrift für das deutsche Volk*) sought to capture this emerging spiritual transformation. The book included chapters by a number of radical artists, architects, and writers, including Karl Korsch, who went on to become one of the most prominent theorists of council communism. As the title suggests, the text sought to respond to the rhetoric of the people (the *Volk*) through which the right had increasingly mobilised. This was a spiritual struggle. The Expressionist writer Kasimir Edschmid's contribution argued that '[n]ot a lost war, not a soldiers' revolt, not a workers' uprising make a revolution . . . These events were merely the form, the organisation, which absorbed and framed the revolution. The content was provided only by the Idea'.³⁰⁷ The idea was provided especially by literature, which he called a 'seismograph of the era'.³⁰⁸ Crucially, he argued that the revolutionary idea did not come from economic questions, problems of hunger or a desire for power, and that true revolutionaries did not see themselves as workers or proletarians. Rather, behind the word 'socialisation' 'stood the German youth, the young German intelligence', and ultimately, 'German culture'.³⁰⁹

The desire for spiritual and even national renewal so prominent among Expressionist-influenced radicals left them at odds with many Marxist critics, who argued that this was a pseudo-radicalism that fetishised the fragmenting and shocking qualities of modernity, but remained inattentive to the material and class bases of oppression and exploitation. These debates continued on over the following two decades, and are most familiar to us today in the 'Expressionism debates' of the 1930s. Writing in the context of the socialist realist rejection of avant-garde experimentation, the realist aesthetics of the Popular Front, and the polemics following on from the attempts by the Expressionist writer Gottfried Benn to claim the movement for Nazism,³¹⁰ the main antagonists in this later debate were Georg Lukács and Ernst Bloch, with others, including Bertolt Brecht, Theodor W. Adorno, and Walter Benjamin, also weighing in. The Expressionism debates were foundational to Marxist

306 Goll 1921, p. 11.

307 Edschmid 1919, p. 120.

308 Edschmid 1919, p. 121.

309 Edschmid 1919, pp. 120–21.

310 On Benn, see Klaus Mann, 'Gottfried Benn. Die Geschichte einer Verirrung', in Schmitt 1973, pp. 39–49. Mann's article appeared in the issue of the journal *Das Wort* in which, as I discuss below, the initial attack on Expressionism was published in 1937.

conceptions of aesthetics and politics, continuing to inform discussions in the field today. Because these debates are so well known, I will begin here by reviewing the different positions that emerged in the 1930s before tracing their roots in the conflicts over aesthetics and politics dating back to 1918.

The Expressionism debates largely took place in the émigré journal *Das Wort*. Alfred Kurella, writing under the pseudonym Bernhard Ziegler, inaugurated the discussion in 1937 with an article developing a Lukácsian critique of Expressionism from the perspective of realism.³¹¹ This was followed by a number of pieces, including Ernst Bloch's spirited defence of Expressionism. Benjamin's 'Work of Art' essay was also intended as an intervention, although the editors of *Das Wort* declined to publish it. The debates revolved around the key themes of this chapter: totality and fragmentation, nostalgia and shock. Lukács's article rejecting Bloch's defence of the radical potential of Expressionism made the case in precisely these terms. In 'taking the isolated state of mind of a specific class of intellectuals as his starting-point', Lukács argued that Bloch 'constructs a sort of home-made model of the contemporary world, which logically enough appears to him as a "non-world"'.³¹² This model reflected Bloch's mistaken view of capitalist modernity as irreducibly fragmented. In Lukács's view, however, both Bloch and the Expressionism he was defending merely captured surface ruptures and discontinuities that obscured the underlying social totality. To this Expressionist aesthetic of fragmentation Lukács counterposed his own critical realism.³¹³

Lukács argued that it was Expressionism's misrecognition of the nature of fragmentation that led it astray. Echoing the KPD's earlier critiques of artistic radicals in Munich, he described Expressionism as the artistic equivalent of the USPD, a pseudo-revolutionary force.³¹⁴ This was a potentially serious charge in this period, especially in light of the KPD's campaign against 'social fascism' in the late 1920s. Lukács drew on this notion of the continuity between social democracy and fascism in arguing that 'Expressionism is undoubtedly only one of the many tendencies in bourgeois ideology that grow later into fascism,

311 The most complete collection of documents is Schmitt 1973. In English, a number of the key interventions were collected in *Aesthetics and Politics* (Bloch et al., 1977).

312 Lukács, 'Realism in the Balance', in Bloch et al. 1977, p. 42.

313 Lukács, 'Realism in the Balance', in Bloch et al. 1977, pp. 30–32.

314 Lukács, 'Realism in the Balance', in Bloch et al. 1977, pp. 49–52. Lukács's reading of Expressionism was rather limited. He did not look at visual Expressionism, basing his account on a limited number of literary sources and especially theoretical texts (Sheppard 1995, pp. 262–64). As Richard Sheppard argues, for all of the insights he may have produced, 'when all is said and done, Lukács knew relatively little about Expressionism' (Sheppard 1995, p. 272).

and its role in the ideological preparation for fascism is no greater – if also no less – than that of many other simultaneous tendencies'.³¹⁵ Expressionism was thus the artistic equivalent of a reactionary social democracy.

Bloch's defence of Expressionism conceded a number of Lukács's points, but he argued that Lukács and Kurella nevertheless missed the underlying significance of the movement. 'The importance of Expressionism is to be found exactly where Ziegler [Kurella] condemns it: it undermined the schematic routines and academicism to which the "values of art" had been reduced. Instead of eternal "formal analyses" of the work of art, it directed attention to human beings and their substance, in their quest for the most authentic expression possible'.³¹⁶ Bloch further argued that Expressionism drew on the sources of popular and folk art, breaking the social isolation of 'art',³¹⁷ although the lack of success Expressionists had in gaining a wide audience suggests that Bakhtin was correct in arguing that such popular art had been rendered obsolete.

Lukács rejected the avant-garde idea of abolishing the distinction between art and life. The terms of his refusal of Expressionism are telling. He saw the idea of a 'folk' art deployed by Expressionists as wrong-headed, refusing to countenance Bloch's celebration of the movement for 'focus[ing] attention on the drawings of children and prisoners, on the disturbing works of the mentally sick, and on primitive art'.³¹⁸ It was precisely these tendencies that produced what he called a 'sick art'.³¹⁹ Certainly, as I have indicated earlier, the primitivist appropriation of figures of marginality had significant problems, but Lukács rejects them not for their fetishisation of bodily and psychic difference, but in the name of a hygienic notion of health and illness. Indeed, he goes so far as to claim that a healthy art is one built on a 'cultural heritage' of realism that reflects authors who 'are an organic product of the development of their nation'.³²⁰ Bloch's nostalgic conception of 'authentic expression' is trumped here by an even narrower and more repressive nostalgia for the

315 'Expressionism: Its Significance and Decline', in Lukács 1980, p. 87. Perhaps a more useful argument is offered in Eliot Neaman's discussion of Ernst Jünger's aestheticisation of shock. 'While the German left agonized over the political value of expressionism, Jünger easily incorporated that movement's aggressive, soul-wrenching motifs into his art' (1999, p. 35).

316 Bloch 'Discussing Expressionism' in Bloch et al. 1977, p. 23.

317 Bloch 'Discussing Expressionism' in Bloch et al. 1977, pp. 25–27.

318 Quoted in Lukács, 'Realism in the Balance' in Bloch et al. 1977, p. 53.

319 Lukács 1970.

320 Lukács, 'Realism in the Balance' in Bloch et al. 1977, p. 54.

nation. Whatever the critical potential of Lukács's conception of realism may have been, it certainly did not lie in these invocations of a national heritage.

These debates over the 1930s will be very familiar to those who work with Marxist aesthetics and politics. What they demonstrate is the enduring importance of Expressionism as a movement not only that straddles the modernism/avant-garde divide, but that also served as a touchstone in Marxist attempts to come to grips with the challenge of both these movements. As this account also suggests, interpretations of capitalist modernity that revolved around conceptions of nostalgia and shock were at the heart of the debates over aesthetics and politics. Less well known are the roots of these debates in the 1910s and early 1920s; this is what I will trace out here, while in the final chapter I will return to Marxist debates over aesthetics and politics in the later Weimar years.

The conflicts between Lukács and Bloch date back as early as 1911, when they formed a brief yet intense friendship. They met through Simmel, with their subsequent debates highlighted by productive disagreements around questions of totality and fragmentation.³²¹ It was in part in response to these debates that Bloch wrote his first major work, *The Spirit of Utopia*, during the War. It was initially published in 1918 and revised in 1923. The book discussed Expressionism, but more importantly it was intended as a truly Expressionist philosophical work. The fragmented and elliptical structure of the text as much as its content was thus expressive of what Bloch later argued was the radical core of the Expressionist project.³²²

Bloch's engagement with Expressionism did not offer a straightforward defence of the movement; both then and later he remained a very cautious adherent. In fact, he saw Expressionism as emblematic of the ambivalent nature of the post-War revolutions.

321 Jung 1988. Jung argues that '[c]ontrary to Lukács, Bloch thoroughly accepted "the darkness of the lived moment" as the stuff and subject matter of modern art. The insignificant life, which for Lukács is already transcended in the totality of the perfected work, for Bloch is a requirement for the production of art . . . Where Lukács planned the objectivity and totality of the perfected work, there Bloch pleaded for the unfinished, which offers the receptive subject more room for play than the one-sided, linear, and exhaustible work of classical or classicistic type' (pp. 52–53).

322 This utopian moment in Bloch's early writing was sustained throughout his later work, his communism drawing on romantic commitment in which 'the organic, religious and heretical, popular and rural communitarian past is a source of inspiration for modern revolutionary utopias, charging the Marxist conception of history with messianic energy' (Löwy and Sayre 2001, p. 177).

The War ended, the Revolution began, and along with the Revolution, doors opened. But of course, they soon shut. The black marketeer moved, sat back down, and everything obsolete drifted back into place.³²³

Expressionism, he argued, was implicated in both the revolutionary and counter-revolutionary moments: 'indeed, Expressionism's former votaries – incinerating what they had just recently exalted – rush to help incompetent literary homesteaders patch together misrepresentations from the tasteful ruins of the past, in order to bar the way for the vitally formative consciousness of the future, of the city, of the collective; in order to transform the profiteers' lies into ideology; in order to make their lamentable hygiene, their doubly imitative Romanticism absolute'.³²⁴ He goes on: '[i]nstead of this petty generation being ashamed of itself for mostly failing before a principle of which it had nevertheless had a presentiment, the postulate of the very dawning of creative Expression, it now in addition to all that slanders even the presentiment, the historical-philosophically overdue principle itself, because to its misfortune it found only this petty generation'.³²⁵

Expressionists thus consistently betrayed the movement's core value. It was that radical core that Bloch sought to reclaim and open out onto the world; it was only in that movement out into everyday life that, he believed, Expressionism could produce its revolutionary effect.

The inner glow won for us elsewhere may certainly not glimmer only on high here, but must move back far into the medial life all around. From this place of the self-encounter [in Expressionist practice], so that it may become one for everyone, there consequently also springs, inevitably, the arena of political-social leadership: toward real personal freedom, toward real religious affiliation. Here, then, a *second* point has been attained, where the 'soul', the 'intuition of the We', the content of its 'Magna Carta', streams responsibly into the world. To be practical in this way, to help in this way on everyday life's structural horizon and put things into place, precisely to be political-social in this way, is powerfully near to conscience, and is a revolutionary mission absolutely inscribed in utopia.³²⁶

323 Bloch 2000, p. 1.

324 Bloch 2000, p. 2.

325 Bloch 2000, p. 236. On pp. 235–36 Bloch repeats in somewhat modified form the two previous quotes (from pp. 1–2); the passage quoted here thus follows directly from the previous two.

326 Bloch 2000, pp. 236–37.

This utopian moment, which he later conceived of as hope, marks a radical openness in Bloch's work, a nostalgic moment that he links with older forms of craft production. Bloch retains a romantic attachment to past social forms that has echoes of Landauer, but like Benjamin in 'The Storyteller' he is forced to admit that that world is gone: 'the old craftsmen will not return'.³²⁷ Bloch's response to this loss is a characteristically Expressionist turn to the primitive. We have forgotten how to play or practice a craft, '[b]ut in return, we paint like savages again, in the best sense, in the sense of the primordial, the restless, unconcerned, concerned'.³²⁸

Bloch was not alone in this period in reading Expressionism as a profoundly ambivalent movement. Even Adorno was convinced that Expressionism had made a significant contribution. In a 1920 article in *Die neue Schaubühne* he argued that Expressionism had fulfilled one of its key goals: '[t]he rusty barbed wire fence between art and life is torn up; the two are one'.³²⁹ However, Adorno also anticipated Lukács's later position, arguing that the Expressionist 'artist, unable or unwilling, to shape the multiplicity of the world from its totality into a type, makes the individual and ultimately the contingent experiential impression the depiction of the world, and by doing so simply subordinates the soul to the totality to which he had undertaken to give artistic form'.³³⁰ Adorno thus identifies the impasse that, as I have argued earlier, emerged at the heart of Expressionism, its inability to adequately mediate between the dual pulls of the radically esoteric and the expansively popular.

The contradictions at the heart of the Expressionist project led many critics to argue that, as Siegfried Kracauer put it in 1920, the movement had 'exhausted its possibilities'.³³¹ For Kracauer, Expressionism's significance lay in its challenge to the fragmenting and alienating impacts of modern industrial life and its insight that 'world and personality are interchangeable concepts', but its response to these insights had failed. A new art was therefore needed 'that no longer permits the advocacy, as does Expressionism, of the concerns of an abstract humanity by means of equally abstract types, but rather gives life to the general in the particular, embodying totally the human essence

327 Bloch 2000, p. 11.

328 Bloch 2000, p. 10. For a more extended interpretation of this approach in the context of Bloch's larger oeuvre, see Löwy and Sayre 2001, pp. 169–87.

329 Adorno 1992, p. 257.

330 Adorno 1992, p. 258.

331 'Schicksalswende der Kunst', in Kracauer 2004, 5.1, p. 94 (originally published in 1920).

in accordance with its whole surging fullness'.³³² Hans Mayer's comment on Bloch can apply to Expressionism more broadly: 'Bloch speaks forcefully of the oppressed and wronged, but has in mind only the communality of their fate, not the oppressed and wronged individuals themselves whose actions and sufferings cannot be subsumed under universal laws of nature'.³³³

Not all of Expressionism's successor movements managed to escape these dilemmas. As Benjamin argued in 'Left-Wing Melancholy' in 1931, two such movements, Activism and the *neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity or New Sobriety), shared Expressionism's intellectual radicalism divorced from any connection with the labour movement. In Benjamin's view, this radicalism was 'a phenomenon of bourgeois dissolution ... Expressionism exhibited the revolutionary gesture, the raised arm, the clenched fist in papier-mâché'.³³⁴ For Benjamin, Surrealism had much greater potential. If Expressionism had exhausted itself, though, new movements like Dada, the precursor to Surrealism, were offering new possibilities. German Dada in particular was home to a number of artists, writers, and cultural radicals who, for Benjamin and others, offered the promise of the avant-garde as a force uniting a radical culture and politics.

Dada was not unconnected with Expressionism, with many Dadaists having participated in Expressionism. They articulated their own critiques of the movement that took up many of the challenges laid down by Lukács and others. Thus, Richard Huelsenbeck, editor of the *Dada Almanac*, argued that 'Expressionism is not spontaneous action. It is the gesture of tired people who wish to escape themselves and forget the present, the war and the misery ... They have forgotten how to be daring'.³³⁵ Whilst the themes of fragmentation and totality that occupied the Expressionists also animated Dada, their work rejected the affirmative character of Expressionism's dreams of spiritual regeneration and renounced any claim to transcendence.³³⁶ Thus, whereas Expressionism sought wholeness in the face of modern fragmentation, 'Dada has taken the mechanisation, the sterility, the rigidity and the tempo of these

332 'Schicksalswende der Kunst', in Kracauer 2004, 5.1, p. 78. See Frisby 1993, pp. 103–8 for a discussion of the aesthetic and sociological theories of Bloch and Kracauer in the period. I have borrowed the translation of the second passage here from Frisby (p. 105).

333 Mayer 1982, p. 2.

334 'Left-Wing Melancholy', in Benjamin 1999b, p. 424. On Benjamin's engagements with Expressionism, see Rumold 2002, pp. 110–36.

335 Richard Huelsenbeck, 'What did Expressionism want?', in Huelsenbeck 1993, p. 44. See also Alexander Partens (a collective pseudonym for Tristan Tzara, Walter Serner and Hans Arp), 'Dada Art', in Huelsenbeck 1993, pp. 91–96.

336 On the personal and thematic confluences and conflicts between Expressionism and Dada, see Sheppard 2000, pp. 236–65; Crockett 1999, pp. 36–48.

times into its broad lap, and in the last analysis it is nothing else and in no way different from them'.³³⁷ Dadaists therefore renounced any theory of social mediation, parodically claiming the contradictory and alienated world itself as Dada.

Dadaists shared Bloch's concern with the ease that Expressionism settled into the new, counter-revolutionary order. They argued for a radicalised conception of the Expressionist desire for the abolition of the distinction between art and life in order to avoid such an eventuality. Dada therefore involved a kind of total social engagement. This can be seen in 'A Declaration from Club Dada' sent by Johannes Baader to 19 Berlin newspapers: 'Dada is the chaos from which a thousand regulations are made, which in turn entangle to form the chaos of Dada. Dada is simultaneously the course and the content of world history in its entirety'.³³⁸ Baader's quasi-parodic megalomania was but one instance of the broader Dadaist claim of the total integration of art and life. Whilst Baader's own interventions were not concretely political, other Dadaists viewed the integrated/alienated social order as the product of imperialist capitalism. The movement had started out with a relatively vague understanding of politics when it had formed in Zurich in the last years of the War. As Huelsenbeck later reflected: '[w]e were proletarians, because we had nothing to eat, but there was a world of difference between us and real proletarianism. We remained protesters against Germanness (as we imagined it), we knew little of materialist Marxism, and because we were basically German ideologists, we knew little of its goals'.³³⁹ As a number of participants later recalled, the impact of the post-War revolutionary events sharpened their political focus and led many to develop a more sustained political critique.³⁴⁰ Thus, Raoul Hausmann moved in an anarcho-communist direction, while a number of others – including George Grosz and the brothers John Heartfield and Wieland Herzfelde – became increasingly involved with the KPD.³⁴¹

337 Huelsenbeck, 'What Did Expressionism Want?', in Huelsenbeck 1993, p. 44.

338 Johannes Baader, 'A Declaration from Club Dada', in Huelsenbeck 1993, p. 136. The text, constituting the first half of 'The Eight Universal Tenets of Master Johannes Baader on the Order of Humanity in Heaven, accompanied by an Explanation of Same', came with a demand that Baader be recognised with the awarding of all five Nobel prizes for his efforts.

339 'Von Dada zur Weltordnung', in Huelsenbeck 1994, p. 73.

340 See, for example, Hans Richter's history of Dada (n.d., pp. 101–29) and George Grosz's autobiography (Grosz 1983, pp. 113–18). The latter stresses that their politics nevertheless remained rather muddled during the revolutionary events.

341 See for example, Hausmann 1919b; 1919d; Hausmann, 'What is Dadaism and What does It Want in Germany?', in Huelsenbeck 1993, pp. 73–75.

While they did not necessarily share a common theory of revolution, Dadaists were implacably hostile to the post-War establishment of parliamentarianism and bourgeois respectability. As Hausmann put it in the inaugural issue of *Der Dada*, referring to SPD-led reformism, '[t]he atmosphere of shady horse-trading (German Revolution) is not ours'.³⁴² In addition to radical post-War politics, Dada's aesthetic and political revolts were rooted in the experience of war; indeed, the first issue of *Der Dada* was dated '[y]ear 1 of the world peace'. In 1924, Grosz stressed how important the War's violence had been in fuelling Dada's initial aesthetic and political rage: 'art mused upon cubes and the Gothic period while military leaders painted in blood'. While they shared a visceral reaction to war's destruction, '[w]e still did not see that this insanity was built upon a system. The coming revolution brought to light the recognition of this system'.³⁴³ This awareness also marked the decisive break with Expressionism. Dada reflected the extreme alienation of social life back upon itself – although as Brecht later commented, this was also a source of weakness: 'Dadaism and Surrealism use the most extreme kinds of *Verfremdungseffekt* [estrangement effect, one of Brecht's key aesthetico-political strategies]. Their objects never return from the alienation'.³⁴⁴

In the Dadaist practice of symbolically overturning the dominant social order through parodic repetition, we find perhaps the strongest example of the echoes of the carnivalesque described by Bakhtin. This was especially the case in Berlin in 1918–19, where Dadaists sought to establish a 'Dada Republic' as an alternative virtual universe. Through the placement of ads and articles in newspapers, they 'created' their own banks, ad agencies, churches, parliaments and welfare institutions, a shadow order that mimicked bourgeois society. This was an absurdist version of the SPD's parallel culture. Stickers proclaiming Dadaist slogans ('Dada is senseless' or 'Dada, kick my arse, I like that') were stuck around the city. Mimicking and using the commercial press, with its empty headlines, advertising slogans, and ubiquitous presence in the city, Dadaist interventions sought to disrupt the smooth operation of capitalist cultural production.³⁴⁵ This culminated in the proclamation by Hausmann and Baader in early March of 1919 that the 'Nikolasee World Republic' was to be formed in a region of Berlin on 1 April 1919; the government, spooked by the

342 Hausmann, 'Alitterel', in Ades 2006, p. 84.

343 Grosz, 'George Groß', in Ades 2006, p. 310.

344 'The *Verfremdungseffekt* in the Other Arts', in Brecht 2000, p. 10.

345 Grosz 1983, p. 137; Biro 2009, pp. 55–62; Malcolm Green, 'Preface', in Huelsenbeck 1993, p. xiii.

formation of radical republics across the country, took this seriously enough that they readied troops to counter the fictional new republic.³⁴⁶

Dada was thus in a sense a 'caricature of nihilism' that, as Leopold Zahn argued at the time, was 'self-negating, self-mocking'.³⁴⁷ This nihilism was not an existential stance, but a parodic reflection of the nihilism generated by capitalist modernity and exemplified by the War. It was a nihilism produced by the turn to information, the serialised and empty culture that Benjamin, as we saw earlier, associated with the constant shocks of contemporary life and empty experience (*Erlebnis*). For Baader, then, the War itself was nihilistic media spectacle: '[t]he World War is a newspaper war. In reality, it never existed'.³⁴⁸

Under Dada, the use of the detritus of capitalist cultural production became more concrete and sustained. This was especially evident in the practices of montage that they pioneered. Kurt Schwitters's *Merz* projects, particularly his massive *Merzbau* – a collection of detritus that grew to encompass and overflow his whole house – were among the more significant examples. *Merz* works were made up of random items collected from the streets, stolen from friends, or given to him, including everything from cigarette butts to items of clothing. The Dadaist claim of identity with the commodified world of capitalism was given its most sustained form in the *Merzbau*, its collection of trash expressive of the cultural logic of nostalgia and shock.³⁴⁹ While Schwitters was no political radical, the way in which his quasi-architectural project consumed and broke through the confines of the bourgeois dwelling suggested that a new social form was coming into being; objects had come to life.

Schwitters's indiscriminate collecting echoes Benjamin in some respects. Benjamin looked to an older collecting impulse as an expression of a powerful critical nostalgic potential. Like the flâneur or the storyteller, he argued in 1931 that the collector represented a vanishing mode of relating to objects – a concern with their fate rather than their utility. For the collector, 'ownership is the most intimate relationship that one can have to objects',³⁵⁰ and as a mode of acquisition founded on unreturned borrowing, it is not a commodified relationship. Schwitters's *Merzbau* echoed this interest in decommodified

346 Raoul Hausmann, 'Latest News from Germany', in Ades 2006, p. 47 mentions the Republic in the context of a broader absurdist reconfiguration of German geography. See also Biro 2009, p. 62.

347 Zahn 1920, p. 50.

348 Johannes Baader, 'Germany's Greatness and Decline', in Huelsenbeck 1993, p. 101. This anticipates Baudrillard's analysis of the Gulf War.

349 On Schwitters and *Merz*, see Dickerman 2005; Dietrich 1993.

350 'Unpacking My Library: A Talk about Book Collecting' in Benjamin 1968, p. 67.

relations. Schwitters himself was akin to Benjamin's rag-picker, the figure on whom he modelled his *Arcades Project*. In the decay of the commodity, the rag-picker found new use values; this is a dialectical image for Benjamin, one that threatens to shatter the spell of the commodity. In the case of Schwitters, as Leah Dickerman argues, his critique lies in the fact that he is 'not simply bourgeois, but often excessively bourgeois, taking certain preoccupations in his work to a hyperbolic, even grotesque, extreme'.³⁵¹ The parodic excess in Schwitters's work replicates both the proliferation of the commodities of consumer capitalism and bourgeois practices of display.

Ultimately, though, Schwitters's desire to maintain the distinction between art and politics and retain the primacy of art, meant that his project lacked the dialectical mediation on which Benjamin insisted, and led to a break with the more politicised core of the Dadaist movement. Describing *Merz* in 1921, he argued against Huelsenbeck's desire to make 'radical communism a Dadaist demand'.³⁵² Mocking Huelsenbeck as a 'husk Dadaist' (in German, a play on his name), Schwitters rejected political art, arguing that 'such an outlook is alien to Merz. Merz strives only for the principle of art, as no one can serve two masters'.³⁵³ He left the movement over this question, rejecting the attempts of his former colleagues to abolish art as an autonomous sphere. As Schwitters argued in 1923: 'I compared Dadaism in its most exalted form with Merz and came to this conclusion: whereas Dadaism merely poses antitheses, Merz reconciles antitheses by assigning relative values to every element in the work of art. Pure Merz is pure art, pure Dadaism is non-art; in both cases deliberately so'.³⁵⁴

Dadaists also turned to montage as a critical practice, but refused the nostalgic reconciliation through art held out by Schwitters. Like Schwitters, though, they turned to everyday objects. Raoul Hausmann – thinking perhaps of the medieval mysticism of someone like Landauer – argued in his 1922 'In Praise of the Conventional': '[w]hat is a medieval saint to me? Our age needs the art that springs from hairdressers' models and tailors' mannequins and the pictures in the fashion magazines, all of which are entirely conventional and entirely contemporary'.³⁵⁵ The use of everyday objects and images was exemplified by

351 Dickerman 2005, p. 105. She is arguing here against readings of Schwitters as apolitical. As I suggest below, while her argument is interesting, it has its limits.

352 Schwitters 1921, pp. 5–6.

353 Schwitters 1921, p. 6. Interestingly, in Robert Motherwell's widely used 1951 anthology of Dadaist writings, the brief section on Huelsenbeck's communism is left out of the text.

354 Quoted in Dietrich 1993, p. 19.

355 Hausmann 1993, p. 293.

Hannah Höch. She made collages from the fragments of fashion magazines, and the 'Dada-dolls' she constructed in the later war years embodied the critical mobilisation of the detritus of mass culture.³⁵⁶ Thus, unlike Expressionists who sought to transcend the mundane world, Dada revelled in it. They also rejected art's vanguardist role that we saw exemplified in the artist-leader in Toller's *Transformation*, and that Schwitters sought to assign to *Merz*. As Debbie Lewer argues, 'Dadaist practices broke down and critiqued the conventional relationship between the agitator-as-preacher and the masses-as-congregation as it was encouraged in revolutionary idealism'.³⁵⁷

Benjamin argued that Dadaist montage formed a largely unconscious anticipation of later developments in film. In his essay on 'The Work of Art' he argued that 'the work of art of the Dadaists became an instrument of ballistics. It hit the spectator like a bullet, it happened to him, thus acquiring a tactile quality'.³⁵⁸ This tactile quality is analogous to the impact of filmic images that he saw as integral to the experience of modern life. In Benjamin's view, film's commodification meant that it reproduced capitalist practices. But Benjamin felt that Soviet film, as a form of representation and experience commensurate to the new social situation and the new socialist human, offered revolutionary possibilities. Dada had not yet reached this point: '[b]y means of its technical structure, the film has taken the physical shock effect out of the wrappers in which Dadaism had, as it were, kept it inside the moral shock effect'.³⁵⁹

I will return to Dadaist and post-Dadaist visual culture in later chapters, but here I want to look more closely at the bodily impact that Benjamin identifies with Dadaist shock. Indeed, there is nothing more closely associated with Dada than shock. Their public performances, which were largely responsible for their notoriety, were especially significant in this respect. Starting with the Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich during the War, and continuing in Berlin in its aftermath, Dada's absurdist shows deliberately sought to stir up outrage through their violent parodies of art and bourgeois morality. For critics, these were shallow and meaningless attempts to gain attention, but there was arguably a more systemic critique at work here. 'Dada evenings' took the form of extended assaults on linguistic intelligibility and the notion of community

356 On her dolls, see Makela 2007, pp. 58–59. Höch was not the only woman in Dada to use dolls; Emmy Hennings's writings used dolls to express the reified nature of human relations (Hemus 2009, p. 51).

357 Lewer 2011, p. 16.

358 'The Work of Art', in Benjamin 1968, p. 238.

359 'The Work of Art', in Benjamin 1968, p. 238.

implied in performance.³⁶⁰ In these performances, art, language, the audience, and the social order were all subjected to deconstructive practices that broke down the limits of comprehensibility. Their *Bruitist*, *Simultaneist*, and *Static* poems, derived in part from futurist practice, mimicked the noise and chaos of the city and highlighted the arbitrary nature of signification by breaking down and rearranging the components of language, thereby collapsing the distinctions between art and life.³⁶¹ The Simultaneous poem, in Hausmann's description, involved 'several speakers yelling completely different but rhythmically arranged sentences from *piano* to *fortissimo*, interspersed with rattles, whistles, hisses, a Negro song and beats on the drum'.³⁶² The Static poem was most explicitly aimed at shattering meaning, with words split up into syllables, displayed to the audience on cards, and then mixed up in random order.

Static poetry also suggests links with Dadaist publishing. Their typographical experiments extended the linguistic 'salad' (a term they used frequently) into the visual realm. *Der Dada*, the most important of the many publications produced in Berlin, featured elaborate montages of letters and words. Hannah Höch's integration of mass media texts and images took this semiotic game to a higher level, producing subtle analyses of the dynamics of capitalist culture, gender, sexuality, and race. In these instances, language was torn from its contexts, thereby highlighting its fragmented and instrumentalised nature in contemporary culture. Dada also pushed the loss of meaning characteristic of capitalist modernity to its extreme. Dadaist language was not simply

360 The significance of performance to the early development of Dada is stressed by Partsch 2006, who also argues that the performance, ritual, and community formed in the Cabaret Voltaire goes beyond the pure negation of (bourgeois) communal life than is generally acknowledged. On the 1920 Berlin Dada Fair, the most significant of the Berlin Dada events, see Altshuler 1994, pp. 98–115.

361 Peter Sloterdijk argues that 'Dada demanded from existence (*Dasein*) an absolute simultaneity with the tendencies of its own time – existential avant-garde', and that in this respect Dada 'anticipates motifs of Heidegger's existential ontology, which, for its part, criticizes the lie of the subject in the European philosophy of domination on the highest conceptual plane' (1987, p. 394). The difference, he argues, is Heidegger's 'respectability', which is also at the root of his reactionary politics, while Dada's playful and productive approach (a 'kynical vitalism') places it in the anti-fascist camp. While the connections Sloterdijk draws here are significant, the reliance on a mere difference in attitude to account for the gap between Heidegger and Dada does not adequately capture the extent to which the former sought a nostalgic reintegration of that fragmented subject in his opposition to the *They* (the inauthentic mode of being), as well as the relative centrality of socialist politics to Dada.

362 Quoted in marginal notes by Malcolm Green to Huelsenbeck, 'Dadaistisches Manifest' in Huelsenbeck 1993, p. 47.

nonsense, however. Rather, it challenged the assumed coherence of the phenomenal world, and especially its hegemonic constructs. Thus, as Andreas Kramer points out, Dada's linguistic experimentation was part of a self-conscious challenge to ideas of nation and homeland with which language was so often bound up.³⁶³ Montage also reflected the unassimilable fragmentation and stimulation produced by capitalist cultural production – the technique followed the Dadaist practice of reclaiming this alienation as their own. The mimetic relationship of montage with the world of capitalist culture was both a strength and a weakness, however, with Dadaist aesthetics easily incorporated in advertising, illustrated magazines, or political propaganda.

The principle of negation kept Dada from simply reproducing the dominant cultural logic, however, and provided the link to political radicalism. In his 'Dada Manifesto 1918', Tristan Tzara argued that a whole range of bourgeois practices, including psychoanalysis, science, philosophy and morality, were agents of systematisation and order.

What we need are strong, straightforward, precise works which will be forever misunderstood. Logic is a complication. Logic is always false. It draws the superficial threads of concepts and words towards illusory conclusions and centres. Its chains kill, an enormous myriapod that asphyxiates independence.³⁶⁴

These straightforward works are to be animated by Dadaist disgust: 'the absolute and indisputable belief in every god that is an immediate product of spontaneity: **DADA**. . . Liberty: **DADA DADA DADA**; – the roar of contorted pains, the interweaving of contraries and of all contradictions, freaks and irrelevancies: **LIFE**'.³⁶⁵

The turn to spontaneous 'life' in Tzara's account in a sense belies the Dadaist focus on the mechanical and artificial, but this is not an organic, integrated vision of life; rather, it is fundamentally marked by contradiction and negation. It is also emphatically not the militarised state of total mobilisation that we saw with Jünger and the radical right, although Dada too was responding to the fragmentation and destruction of war. Dada refused such false resolutions.

³⁶³ Kramer 2011. This anti-national project was expressive of the experience of exile in Zurich during the War, which was simultaneously anti-war, but Kramer argues that this dimension of Dada continued to play an important role after the move to Berlin.

³⁶⁴ Tristan Tzara, 'Dada Manifesto 1918', in Huelsenbeck 1993, p. 130. The manifesto was initially read at a Dada evening on 23 July 1918.

³⁶⁵ Tristan Tzara, 'Dada Manifesto 1918', in Huelsenbeck 1993, p. 132.

In this sense, as Richter argued in his history of the movement, 'Dada was not an artistic movement in the accepted sense; it was a storm that broke over the world of art as the war did over the nation'.³⁶⁶ The movement's work bore the traces of this parallel history. As T.J. Demos suggests in his discussion of Hugo Ball in Zurich, while Dadaist practice involved the reduction of language to the materiality of the voice, to non-sense, their poetry was marked by the nervous exhaustion and trauma of war: 'the sign of catastrophe was not completely eliminated from Dadaist poetry. Its dark shadow is still perceptible in its shattered forms . . . The sound poems not only glimpsed an idealized world; they also carried with them the wreckage from this one'.³⁶⁷

At the heart of this Dadaist practice was the body. Dadaist culture, Huelsenbeck proclaimed in 1920, 'is above all of the body'.³⁶⁸ The importance of performance to Dada makes this clear. Beginning at the Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich during the War, Dadaist performances extended and subverted the variety tradition, with Emmy Hennings (a noted cabaret performer) providing a powerful stage presence.³⁶⁹ In these staged happenings, performers confronted audience members. (Their memoirs are replete with gleeful accounts of the chaos that followed). These performances also inaugurated the fascination with the unconscious as expressed through the rhythms of the body that was developed more fully in Surrealism. This characteristic is highlighted by John Wall and Dafydd Jones, who argue that Dadaist experiments with language and performance marked the point of the suppression of the body in Western culture. Dadaist spectacle thus enabled the re-irruption of the material body into the symbolic order.³⁷⁰

Wall and Jones tend to ignore the extent to which this bodily transgression often ran the risk of reproducing dominant ideas of gender, sexuality, race, or ability, a problem that we saw already with Expressionism. There were exceptions, however, especially in terms of gender. The gendered dynamics of Dada proved challenging to negotiate for women in the movement, but they nevertheless developed trenchant critiques of gendered social relations in their work. Hannah Höch was most prominent in this respect; I will look at her work in more detail in the next chapter. Among male Dadaists, Hausmann and Franz Jung were strongly attuned to the complexities of the politics of embodiment, in particular in terms of the reproduction of bourgeois social relations.

366 Richter n.d., p. 9.

367 Demos 2005, pp. 7–8.

368 Huelsenbeck 1951, p. 44.

369 Hemus 2009, pp. 25–30.

370 Wall and Jones 2006, pp. 66–88.

They were strongly influenced in this respect by Otto Gross's anti-bourgeois insistence that sexuality was the driving force in society. While Gross saw his approach as partially anti-Marxist, Jung took his ideas in a more explicitly political direction and became one of the key figures who linked radical art and communist politics.³⁷¹

Hausmann, whose views echoed those of Erich Mühsam in important respects, argued not only that women should have 'the right to their own body', but also that the state should provide the resources to support women's decisions over childbirth and childrearing.³⁷² In a series of articles in the journal *Die Erde*, Hausmann championed matriarchy, and suggested that homosexuality was a normal form of sexual expression that could break down patriarchal forms of domination.³⁷³ The semi-satirical manifesto 'What is Dadaism and What Does It Want in Germany?' (published as a supplement to the first issue of *Der Dada* in 1919) proclaimed a list of demands from the 'Revolutionary Dadaistic Central Committee, German Group'. The final one called for the 'immediate regulation of all sexual relationships according to the international Dadaistic sense through the establishment of a Dadaistic bureau for sex'.³⁷⁴ As part of their broader project of the subversion of social hierarchies and dichotomies, Dadaists frequently rejected gendered norms, promoting a certain androgyny as an ideal subjectivity but, unlike with Expressionists, rooting this in the dense networks of everyday psycho-social relations rather than a spiritual transcendence of the body.³⁷⁵

Despite these sometimes extravagant claims for the dismantling of bourgeois gender and sexual norms and practices, numerous writers have stressed the Dada movement's hostility to women, both in terms of the misogynist nature of their cultural practices (including in their aggressively confrontational performances) and in terms of the lack of inclusion of women within the movement and their general group dynamics. The women who did participate

371 Biro 2009, pp. 133–35; McCloskey 1997, pp. 28–32. Jung was connected to Mühsam's pre-war *Gruppe Tat*, and played an important role during and after the War in bringing people like George Grosz into Dada and an engagement with communist politics.

372 Hausmann 1919a, pp. 244–45. In the final chapter, I will discuss how these issues came to prominence in the later Weimar years.

373 Hausmann 1919f.

374 Jefim Golyscheff, Raoul Hausmann, and Richard Huelsenbeck 1977, p. 62. The manifesto also included points demanding all artistic and spiritual workers be fed daily on Potsdamer Platz, and that churches should be opened to Dada poetry. The manifesto was thus also simultaneously a parody of a manifesto, even while its deliberately absurdist demands reflected very real concerns.

375 Sheppard 2000, pp. 190–92.

(Hannah Höch, Sophie Taeuber, Emmy Hennings, and a few others) tended to be left out of later memoirs and accounts of the movement.³⁷⁶ The textual erasure of these women is especially notable given the prominence of women's bodies as markers of a 'transgressive' cultural practice in Dadaist works themselves. As I will argue in the next chapter, many post-Expressionists made violence against women's bodies central to their aesthetic practice, constructing identities as sexual outlaws that were profoundly misogynist.

The significance of the body and its political ambivalence was also evident in Dadaist primitivism. Dada poetry evoked the primitive body in its search for a primal language. This was in truth a pre-language, a semiotic flux important because it broke down signification. However, Hausmann's evocation of Negro songs and drumbeats in the passage cited earlier inscribes this primitivism explicitly in a racialised and colonial frame, with Dadaists often locating the primitive in Africa. Tzara, for example, claimed that his 'Negro Songs' in the *Dada Almanac* were culled from African anthropological journals and translated by him.³⁷⁷ In other cases Dada sound poems used purportedly – and stereotypically – 'African' sounds to construct their (non-)meaning, the primitive both mimicking and challenging the cacophony of the modern. While Expressionism kept the primitive at a remove, Dadaist primitivism thus involved a bodily identification with the alleged primitive state, albeit one rooted in a colonial fantasy of Africa.

Richard Sheppard offers a partial defence of Dada primitivism, arguing that it 'was less about nostalgia for the presumed innocence of non-Western cultures and more about transgressive exploitation of the "primitive" energies of the psyche; less about closet colonialism and more about the decolonization of those parts of the personality that had allegedly been subjugated by the imperialist ego and superego'.³⁷⁸ Sheppard's comment captures an important dimension of the movement – and of the primitivist moment in general – but as I will argue in subsequent chapters, this 'closet colonialism' needs to be addressed more substantively. Dada was about *both* colonial nostalgia and decolonising transgression. Such an uneasy relationship had often contradictory aesthetic and political implications. Some Dadaists sensed this contradiction, with Huelsenbeck rejecting Tzara's primitivism as a cheap sham, a diversion from the social and political concerns of the movement.³⁷⁹

376 Hemus 2009; Makela 2007; Sawelson-Gorse 1998.

377 Tristan Tzara, 'Negro Songs', in Huelsenbeck 1993, pp. 145–47.

378 Sheppard 2000, p. 184.

379 Huelsenbeck 1951, p. 33. Writing in 1920, Huelsenbeck was arguing more broadly against Tzara's self-promotion as leader of Dada and his empty endorsement of abstract art, seeing this as the mark of an artistic racketeer.

In their engagement with the shocks of capitalist modernity, their performance practices, and the gendered and racialised nature of their aesthetics, Dadaists placed the complex politics of embodiment at the heart of their critique of capitalist modernity. As we shall see in the next chapter, the body was likewise foregrounded in the paintings and sculptures of Dadaist and other post-Expressionist artists. These bodies were often hybrids; cyborg bodies combining flesh and machine. Rather than the seamless metallic bodies of the radical right, though, Dadaist bodies were chaotic and fractured. They reflected fragmentation whilst their grotesque appearance provoked shock. Social crises were likewise expressed as bodily crises, providing a critical mirroring of dominant conceptions of the individual and social body (the *Volkskörper*) that challenged the hygienic discourses of bourgeois society.

The explicit thematisation of the body was also evident in their political orientation. 'In Germany', Huelsenbeck argued in 1920, 'Dadaism became political, it drew the ultimate consequences of its position and renounced art completely'.³⁸⁰ In renouncing art, however, they retained their interest in the psycho-social detritus of the system. Their libidinal and bodily breaking of repressive norms meant that they, like Mühsam or Toller, were held at arms length by much of the organised left. Instead, the left's long-standing tendency of endorsing bourgeois cultural achievements and seeking to make them accessible to the proletariat meant that avant-garde movements were looked on with great suspicion.³⁸¹ This was especially true of the KPD whose main cultural critic, Gertrud Alexander, argued that Dada was nothing but 'bourgeois decadence' in a review of an exhibition for the communist paper *Die Rote Fahne* in 1920.³⁸² Taking the prominent critic Adolf Behne to task for his positive view of Dada, she argued that Dada betrayed only 'a definite miserableness of the spirit or a perversity and desire for sensation'.³⁸³ The terms of this critique are familiar from the KPD's rejection of a degenerate left bohemianism in Munich. Alexander's position also betrayed a profound suspicion of satire as a critical genre.

Lu Märten, a writer, feminist, and KPD member, took an interesting position on this issue. Like Alexander, she rejected satire as a fundamentally bourgeois genre, but argued that Dada could be seen as a realist movement that traced the absurd contours of capitalist society.³⁸⁴ Thus, where the KPD sought to promote a realist aesthetic rooted in bourgeois cultural traditions, Märten

380 Huelsenbeck 1951, p. 37.

381 McCloskey 1997, pp. 57–60.

382 Alexander 1981a, p. 46.

383 Alexander 1981a, p. 47.

384 McCloskey 1997, pp. 81–83.

endorsed the Dadaist aesthetic of fragmentation and shock. As we saw already with the Expressionism debates, these different aesthetic strategies were rooted in competing understandings of the nature of capitalist modernity.

While the relationships between Dada and the communist movement remained strained, connections were slowly developed. One important vehicle for the development of these ties was Malik-Verlag, a publishing house headed by Wieland Herzfelde. He was the brother of John Heartfield, a photomonteur who, as we shall see in the final chapter, became one of the most prominent communist artists. Malik-Verlag focused on cultural works, but also published such key texts as Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness* and Richard Müller's important histories of the post-War revolutions that I cited in the second chapter.

Herzfelde himself had been incarcerated for two weeks in 1919 on political charges, his lengthy account of his experiences published as an issue of the Malik magazine *Die Pleite* (Bankruptcy).³⁸⁵ This magazine was one of the key organs through which more politicised Dadaists – including Herzfelde's brother John Heartfield, George Grosz, and Carl Einstein – sought to develop an avant-garde communist aesthetics. Their approach was influenced by the Russian Proletkult movement associated with Alexander Bogdanov, whose *Art and the Proletariat* had appeared in German translation, and whose essay 'On Proletarian Literature' was featured prominently in the radical Expressionist journal *Die Aktion*.³⁸⁶ These Dadaists defended the Russian revolution and attacked the 'government socialists [*Regierungssozialisten*]' for their betrayal of the revolution in Germany. In the lead issue of *Die Pleite*, Einstein rejected the many-sided esotericism of intellectual art, calling for a turn to the proletariat and a straight-forward culture to match this orientation. 'Individualism is finished, camaraderie in the mass is decisive'.³⁸⁷

The terms of this orientation were set out especially clearly in 1920 when, during the resistance mounted to the right-wing Kapp putsch, a bullet pierced a Rubens painting in the Zwinger Gallery in Dresden. The prominent modernist artist Oskar Kokoschka put out a widely circulated appeal for the antagonists to move the fighting to the shooting range and away from these timeless works of art. Grosz and Heartfield wrote 'Der Kunstlump' ('The Art Scab') as an enraged response. The article denounced a 'society [which] places its art and culture above the lives of the working class'.³⁸⁸ It also polemicised against a classical art that served primarily as an investment for the bourgeo-

385 Herzfelde 1919.

386 Bogdanov 1921.

387 Einstein 1919, p. 2.

388 Grosz and Heartfield 1987, p. 25.

sie and had no use for the working-class struggle, proclaiming: '[w]e happily welcome the news that bullets are being fired into museums and palaces, into the works of Rubens, instead of into the houses of the poor in working class neighbourhoods!'³⁸⁹

Grosz's and Heartfield's provocation generated the first significant debate over art and culture in the pages of the KPD's *Die Rote Fahne*. Gertrud Alexander established herself as a leading critic on this issue, arguing that the 'Kunstlump' article was revolutionary in tone only, but that it really promoted a bourgeois vandalism. In her view, the bourgeois cultural heritage included works of 'genius' that transcended their class-specific location, and could become part of the proletarian cultural heritage. Moreover, she argued that a truly proletarian culture lay only in the future; in the present the proletariat had only bourgeois culture.³⁹⁰ Julian Gumperz responded in *Rote Fahne* (while others commented elsewhere) with a defence of Grosz and Heartfield that rejected Alexander's transcendent notion of art.³⁹¹ Alexander responded by sharpening the political dimensions of her critique, condemning the 'Kunstlump' article for its anarchist implications, and linking its purported call for the destruction of art to the similarly non-revolutionary Luddite attacks on machinery. In contrast, she further argued, '[t]he proletariat [had] long cured itself of this hopeless radicalism'. Instead, the proletarian conquest of power could only mean the appropriation of the capitalist means of production and 'taking up the heritage of the entire [bourgeois] artistic and scientific culture'.³⁹² As August Thalheimer, the editor of *Die Rote Fahne*, put it in a follow-up response, the 'slogan of the destruction or rejection of the art of the past that passes as ultrarevolutionary and antibourgeois is hence in truth a bourgeois slogan, the mirror image of the practice of the declining and self-disintegrating bourgeoisie. The proletariat in its struggle for political power must concentrate all of its strength in this struggle.'³⁹³

The *Kunstlump* debate demonstrates the rather conventional and limited conception of art and the artistic heritage with which the KPD was working in this period, but it is also important to note the context of the Kapp putsch in which this took place. As I noted in the introduction to the book, the KPD's ultra-left response to the putsch had left the Party somewhat isolated from the

389 Grosz and Heartfield 1987, p. 26 (translation modified). On the *Kunstlump* debates, see Doherty 2003; McCloskey 1997, pp. 65–68.

390 Alexander 1981b.

391 Gumperz 1981.

392 Alexander 1981c, p. 120.

393 Thalheimer 1981, p. 123.

broad working-class movement, and had provoked serious criticisms. Thus, Lenin's *Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder* was written as a response to the KPD's handling of the situation, his argument being that the Party had missed a significant opportunity as a result of its 'left-extremism'. As Barbara McCloskey argues, the *Kunstlump* debates echoed these broader trends, with Alexander's condemnation of Grosz and Heartfield reflecting the KPD's newly strengthened resolve against what it saw as individualist ultra-leftism.³⁹⁴ As was so often the case, political and aesthetic questions merged here, although the debate over 'left-extremism' in both spheres was by no means closed by these interventions.

The fallout from the failed putsch and the line taken by the KPD led to splits that included the formation of the KAPD (Communist Workers' Party of Germany), a party that briefly approached the KPD in size. Many radical artists left the KPD for the new Party, including the Dadaist Franz Jung and Franz Pfemfert, the publisher of the politically oriented Expressionist journal *Die Aktion*, in part because the new Party placed a much greater emphasis on cultural activism. Herzfelde remained with the KPD, but in 1921 he published *Society, Artists and Communism*, a sharp critique of the Party's lack of attention to cultural issues as well as the nature of the culture it supported, calling in the process for the formation of a Red Professional Organisation for radical artists.³⁹⁵ In the heat of these debates, the KPD did begin to pay more attention to art and culture, but the real shifts happened over the following years. In fact, Grosz and then Heartfield were each subsequently endorsed as proletarian artists by the Party, with the latter gaining the greatest prominence through his photomontages in the widely read *Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung* (AIZ). As I will discuss at length in the sixth chapter, however, the growing prominence of cultural questions over subsequent years was as much a product of the waning power of the KPD, with cultural questions standing in for political debate.

The influence of left debates over revolutionary strategy and tactics thus needs to be kept strongly in mind when assessing the trajectory of radical art. The KAPD claimed a heritage of 'spontaneity' that stressed revolutionary praxis as the autonomous action of the working class rather than a disciplined party. The ideas of artistic leadership held by many on the cultural left fit well with these precepts. The KPD's desire to hold on to a bourgeois cultural heritage marked one of the important legacies of the pre-war SPD and its progressivist notion of cultural development. It was precisely this tendency that Dadaists attacked through the deployment of shock. This aesthetic was rooted in an understanding of the experience of capitalist modernity as shattering.

394 McCloskey 1997, pp. 64–68. See also Doherty 1983, pp. 81–83.

395 McCloskey 1997, pp. 89–90.

The philosopher and critic Salomo Friedlaender, writing under the pseudonym Mynona in 1922, described Grosz's work as 'the tempo of the simultaneity of the world city'.³⁹⁶ For Huelsenbeck this meant that

the good is for the Dadaist no 'better' than the bad – there is only a simultaneity, in values as in everything else. This simultaneity applied to the economy of facts is communism, a communism, to be sure, which has abandoned the principle of 'making things better' and above all sees its goal in the destruction of everything that has gone bourgeois.³⁹⁷

The Dadaist moment may have something of the 'infantile disorder' here, but it simultaneously exposed the obsolescence of the temporal categories around which KPD and, especially, SPD aesthetics and politics were organised.

It was in this respect that Benjamin, as we saw at the beginning of the chapter, looked to the avant-garde as a source for a revolutionary project that could produce a temporal rupture shattering the continuum of history. In aesthetic terms he conceived of this in terms of a dialectic at a standstill, a project that sought to draw on the avant-garde's mobilisation of shock. In his defence of Grosz and Heartfield, Gumperz was quite right in this respect to claim that they were not simply calling for the destruction of this or that work of art, but that they were challenging the bourgeois fiction that saw art as part of a heritage in which 'a *unified* humanity exists with *common* values and goals'.³⁹⁸ This nostalgic moment implied a false sense of a social totality that was central to bourgeois ideology, and that needed to be shattered. Insofar as temporal and social homogeneity were mutually sustaining, revolution marked their absolute rupture, even if, as Benjamin noted, the avant-garde was not always able to bind revolt to revolution. Rather than a simple fragmentation, however, I will argue that these revolutionary left visions tended to imply an alternative totality. In concluding this chapter, then, I turn to the question of totality in left debates over aesthetics and politics.

3.5 Totality

The concept of totality became central to Marxist debates in Germany during the Weimar period, having been developed in its most elaborated form in the work of Georg Lukács. However, as I have argued in this chapter, the idea

³⁹⁶ Friedlaender 1922, p. 9. 'Mynona' is the German word for 'anonymous' spelled backward.

³⁹⁷ Huelsenbeck 1951, p. 42.

³⁹⁸ Gumperz 1981, p. 116.

of totality in one form or another ran through the culture of the period more broadly. Thus, notions of the *Volksgemeinschaft* and *Volkskörper* – the national community and body that became so prominent during and after the War – can be read as projections of a social totality purged of ‘non-national’ heterogeneity and degeneracy. They represent nostalgic unities that sought to contain and transcend modern fragmentation. While these ideas emerged in especially stark forms on the right, they underlay a broad range of bourgeois discourses (and practices) of a ‘common humanity’ that, as we saw earlier, Gumperz rejected as fictional and repressive. Thus, in considering Marxist debates over totality, we need to keep in mind this broader context, and especially the implications of ideas of a nostalgic totality in practices of embodiment.

In the idea of the *Volkskörper* we can see most clearly the centrality of the body in nostalgic visions of an integrated totality. As I have argued in this chapter, this bodily dimension posed a fundamental challenge to left theory and politics. The sociological concern with the nature of ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ society, with the relationship between nostalgia and shock, was taken up by Marxist writers, but only intermittently in terms of its embodied nature. In the work of the avant-garde, Dada in particular, we find extremely fruitful engagements with the body, despite the limitations often evident in their politics. In this final section, then, I will look at Dadaist aesthetics, in particular that of Hugo Ball, as well as Simmel’s sociology as a way of conceptualising the terms and limitations of these approaches to the problem of nostalgia and shock. Through a critical reading of Lukács I will then take up Marxist approaches to the problem that emerged in the period, and propose a reading of totality that builds from but challenges his understanding, and in which the body is central.

Part of the strength of the Dadaist conception of totality, I have argued, is that it proclaimed a negative identity with the social whole. Yet this negation was difficult to sustain, a problem evident in the work of Hugo Ball. He is perhaps best known for his 1919 book *Critique of the German Intelligentsia*, which sought to develop an integrated notion of German culture. During and after the War, he promoted a critical anti-nationalism that was expressed in terms of quasi-Expressionist transcendence. This can be seen in a 1917 lecture on Kandinsky at the *Galerie Dada*, where Ball argued that ‘artists of these times have turned inward... They are forerunners of an entire epoch, *a new total culture*... They dissociate themselves from the empirical world, in which they perceive chance, disorder, disharmony’.³⁹⁹ Ball formulated this quest for totality in a way that echoed Worringer’s description of abstraction: ‘[t]hey seek what is essential and what is spiritual, what has not yet been profaned, the

399 Hugo Ball, ‘Kandinsky’, in Long 1993, pp. 263–64 (my italics).

background of the empirical world, in order to weigh, to order, to harmonize this new theme of theirs in clear, unmistakable forms, planes, and emphases. They become creators of new natural entities that have no counterpart in the known world'.⁴⁰⁰

Ball's 'total culture' expressed powerfully the desire for a transcendence of the fragmented existence of modern life, but rather than linking this approach to a left politics, as was the case with some of his Dadaist colleagues, he retained a strong distrust of the working class. In *Critique of the German Intelligentsia* he called not for a mass movement, but for a 'democratic church of the intelligentsia'⁴⁰¹ that could inaugurate the new spiritual order. In fact, a worker-state, he argued, was but a manifestation of the German desire (which went back to Luther) for a profane universal state, a state which, 'this time founded on the unpropertied class, the proletariat, is trying to rise again and spread from Berlin'.⁴⁰² His critique of the virulently authoritarian, militaristic German state was tinged with anti-Semitism, and depicted Marxism as an extension of rather than a response to this German problem. While anti-national, his critique was ultimately not so distant from calls for national regeneration, and the potentially reactionary implications of his work grew as he turned from spiritual anarchism to Catholicism.⁴⁰³

Ball's conception of the state as an integrated spiritual totality was configured against the fragmented empirical world of chance, disorder, and disharmony characterised by 'the disappearance of religion induced by critical philosophy, the dissolution of the atom in science, and the massive expansion of population in present-day Europe'.⁴⁰⁴ This understanding of modernity as flux and fragmentation lends some credence to the arguments of critics like Alexander who held that Dada was little more than an unstructured bourgeois rebelliousness. It also brings us back to Georg Simmel, whose work likewise sought to theorise modern fragmentation and the question of totality, although in his case without the turn to a prescriptive 'total culture'. For Simmel, as noted earlier, this was a methodological problem as well. His *Philosophy of Money* can be seen to enact the problematic of totality and fragmentation in both its subject

400 Hugo Ball, 'Kandinsky', in Long 1993, p. 264.

401 Ball 1993, p. 202.

402 Ball 1993, p. 19.

403 As Kramer notes, in late 1918 Ball 'professed himself to be completely German in his essence, and although, like the other Dadas, he was sharply critical of German militarism and chauvinism, there is a tendency for him to subscribe to an inverted German nationalism, with the "logos" performing the role of eternal homeland' (2011, p. 211).

404 Ball, 'Kandinsky', in Long 1993, p. 263.

matter and its construction. The work is a vast compendium of 'fragments of modernity', to borrow David Frisby's term, that strove towards a complex unity, but that methodologically precluded its fulfilment.⁴⁰⁵

Simmel thus eschewed the desire for a 'total culture' that shaped Ball's work, and that animated so many other nostalgic totalities in the period. As Simmel argues in the preface to *The Philosophy of Money*, his methodology expresses the fractured and discontinuous nature of capitalist modernity, projecting totality as a kind of limit condition that is unreachable but that structures thought. 'If the start of the philosophical domain marks, as it were, the lower boundary of the exact domain, then its upper boundary lies at the point where the ever-fragmentary contents of positive knowledge seek to be augmented by definitive concepts into a world picture and to be related to the totality of life.'⁴⁰⁶ The book's organisation reflects this two-fold approach, with analytical and synthetic halves each beginning from one of these boundaries. This approach influenced Benjamin's *Arcades Project*, which was also structured as a massive compendium of fragments gesturing towards the social totality; unlike Simmel, though, Benjamin's totality was also influenced by Marx. Siegfried Kracauer, as well, echoed Simmel, arguing that the surface-level expressions of capitalist modernity 'provide unmediated access to the fundamental substance of the state of things . . . The fundamental substance of an epoch and its unheeded impulses illuminate each other reciprocally'.⁴⁰⁷

Simmel's methodological structuring of totality is given more substance in his discussion of relativism. Here he breaks down the Kantian dualism of noumena and phenomena, arguing that the mind is a product of the world, even while the world is simultaneously a product of the mind. 'If these two genetic possibilities are rigidly conceptualized they result in a disturbing contradiction . . . But the principle contradiction is dissolved by an interpretation of both as heuristic principles; this transforms their opposition into an interaction and their mutual negation into an endless process of interaction'.⁴⁰⁸ The result is a concrete rather than an abstract relativism, one that reflects the structure of social relations, the non-apprehensible totality to which it can only gesture. Simmel's methodology is thus in a sense aesthetic, a quasi-Expressionist evocation of the social totality. Hannes Böhringer evokes a different artistic movement in describing the book as 'a delicate philosophical total design in

405 Frisby 1986. His book draws out the common concern with fragmentation in Simmel, Benjamin, and Kracauer.

406 Simmel 1990, p. 53.

407 'The Mass Ornament', in Kracauer 1995, p. 75.

408 Simmel 1990, p. 113.

Jugendstil, in which things flow aetherially through one another beyond all distances and contradictions and in this way are once more “organically” brought together.’⁴⁰⁹

Böhringer’s comment overstates the organic nature of Simmel’s approach, but the focus on the aesthetic dimension is crucial, a perspective perhaps most evident in Simmel’s argument that the possibility of spiritual renewal could be found in *objects*. Here he comes close to Marx’s conception of objectification when he argues that the significance and intellectual potential of modern life lies not in the shift from the individual to the mass, but instead in the *object-character* of modern life. It lives in the immense abundance of capitalist production, the precision of machines, the products and the supra-individual organisation of contemporary culture. The corresponding ‘revolt of the slaves’ that threatens to dethrone the autocracy and the normative independence of strong individuals is not the revolt of the masses, but the revolt of objects.⁴¹⁰ This was the revolt that Benjamin found in Grandville’s nineteenth-century caricatures in which objects and nature come to life. We also find this revolt of objects in many post-Expressionist critiques of reification. For instance, Hans Richter’s 1927 short film, *Ghosts Before Breakfast*, had everyday objects spontaneously come to life and turn on their owners. Objects, rendered interchangeable with people through processes of rationalisation and instrumentalisation, provide the resources for critical practice.

This account, which may appear very similar to Marx’s conception of alienation, also diverges from it, because Simmel understands such objectification not in terms of labour, but, instead, through money and exchange.⁴¹¹ (Benjamin’s early work was influenced by Simmel’s conception of capitalism. His fragment ‘Capitalism as Religion’, from 1921, gives banknotes a religious cast that he partly linked to Landauer’s mystical anarchism).⁴¹² In contrast

409 Quoted in David Frisby, ‘The Afterword: The Constitution of the Text’, in Simmel 1990, p. 525.

410 Simmel 1990, p. 483.

411 There is in this respect some affinity with Spengler’s reading of money. The penultimate chapter of *Decline of the West* argues that money is a symptom of the late stages of a Culture, rationalistic, materialistic, and opposed to the soul with its rooted, organic, and creative life (Spengler 1928, 2, pp. 467–96).

412 Thus, he suggests ‘[a] comparison between the images of the saints of the various religions and the banknotes of different states. The spirit that speaks from the ornamental design of banknotes’ (‘Capitalism as Religion’ [1921], in Benjamin 1996, p. 290). As Michael Löwy 2009 suggests, it is unclear to what extent Benjamin shared Landauer’s argument, but in this early period Benjamin was not yet framing his arguments in Marxist terms (pp. 62–63).

to Marxist accounts, then, Simmel's conception of money ends by sustaining rather than subverting the logic of reification and commodity fetishism, ignoring the relations of production and the human labour power accumulated in objects that for Marx are the hidden mechanism through which these objects come to life.⁴¹³ He thus misses the contradiction that, as Marx put it, capital 'must have its origin both in circulation and not in circulation',⁴¹⁴ a paradox that Simmel elides because he does not follow Marx into 'the hidden abode of production'.⁴¹⁵ By resting his theory on money, Simmel is therefore unable to adequately theorise a notion of class or class conflict. The interchangeability of objects and people produced by capitalist social relations may enable a 'revolt of objects', but without an analysis of the class basis of objectification we are left with an inadequate account of the social structure.

In the Weimar period, arguably the most influential Marxist analysis of capitalist processes of objectification and reification was developed in the work of Georg Lukács, in particular *History and Class Consciousness*. For Lukács, who had worked with Simmel but, as we saw, moved decisively away from him, these processes are intimately bound up with the question of totality, reflecting the fact

that – for the first time in history – the whole of society is subjected, or tends to be subjected, to a unified economic process, and that the fate of every member of society is determined by unified laws... [T]he worker, too, must present himself as the 'owner' of his labour-power, as if it were a commodity. His specific situation is defined by the fact that his labour-power is his only possession. His fate is typical of society as a whole in that this self-objectification, this transformation of a human function into a commodity reveals in all its starkness the dehumanised and dehumanising function of the commodity relation.⁴¹⁶

Like Simmel, Lukács derives a theory of revolt from these processes of reification. But, due to his different starting point, he does not locate this revolt in a spiritual realm configured in opposition to processes of instrumental rationalisation, identifying instead the immanent emergent consciousness of the proletariat as the subject and object of history. The bifurcation of the material and

⁴¹³ 'The riddle of the money fetish is therefore the riddle of the commodity fetish, now become visible and dazzling to our eyes' (Marx 1976, p. 187).

⁴¹⁴ Marx 1976, p. 268.

⁴¹⁵ Marx 1976, p. 279.

⁴¹⁶ Lukács 1968, p. 92.

the spiritual, of the particular and the whole, which characterises Simmel's work (in common with that of the Expressionists) is from Lukács's perspective a precise reflection of a bourgeois consciousness that, by virtue of its class position, cannot reconcile its two warring sides. 'The reified consciousness must... remain hopelessly trapped in the two extremes of crude empiricism and abstract utopianism'.⁴¹⁷ Only the action of the proletariat as the subject and object of history can make a concrete totality emerge: 'as the innermost kernel of this movement is praxis, its point of departure is of necessity that of action; it holds the immediate objects of action firmly and decisively in its grip so as to bring about their total, structural transformation and thus the movement of the whole gets under way'.⁴¹⁸

In Lukács's account, then, working-class mobilisation is simultaneously: immanent to the social process, the embodiment of the social totality, and the moment of its transcendence. This discussion returns us to the Expressionism debates of the 1930s but there, as we saw, critical realist literature tends to take the place in his work of the working-class movement as the locus of de-reification. The roots of this perspective are evident already in *History and Class Consciousness*. It was in the realm of art that the principle of de-reification, which he dates to the eighteenth century, emerges. 'This principle is the creation of a concrete totality that springs from a conception of form orientated towards the concrete content of its material substratum. In this view form is therefore able to demolish the "contingent" relation of the parts to the whole and to resolve the merely apparent opposition between chance and necessity'.⁴¹⁹ This aesthetic totality enacts, so to speak, the supersession of the fragmented state of experience, a fragmentation to which Expressionism, he later argued, remained wedded. Bloch, whose work was closer to Simmel, questioned precisely this analysis of totality. If Lukács is correct, Bloch argued, 'then Expressionist experiments with disruptive and interpolative techniques are but an empty *jeu d'esprit*, as are the more recent experiments with montage and other devices of discontinuity. But what if Lukács's reality – a coherent, infinitely mediated totality – is not so objective after all?... What if authentic reality is also discontinuous?'⁴²⁰ As I suggested in discussing Expressionism, Lukács does not adequately address this question, especially if we consider the question of fragmentation in terms of embodiment.

417 Lukács 1968, p. 77. On bourgeois consciousness, see pp. 61–67.

418 Lukács 1968, p. 175.

419 Lukács 1968, p. 137.

420 Bloch 'Discussing Expressionism' in Bloch et al. 1977, p. 22.

Given Lukács's positing of the working class as the subject and object of history, what is the position of the critic or theorist of this process, and what political implications can be drawn from his work? One answer to this question is given by Martin Jay, who provides a sociological account of the turn to totality on the part of 'Western Marxists'. Jay argues that the intellectual and class background of these thinkers, Lukács included, was a key reason for this turn.⁴²¹ Almost all of them were middle-class academics largely isolated from the working class in whose name they were theorising. Only from this relatively privileged position could they pretend to survey the terrain of capitalism as a whole, acting out the dream of wholeness that had earlier generated romantic and conservative visions of harmonious social totalities, but now giving them a politically radical charge. In this sense, Jay reads Lukács in a similar way that I have read tendencies in the work of Toller and other Expressionists, although I argue that this does not exhaust their significance. Is this sociological critique adequate in this instance, however? In the case of Lukács, it seems to ignore the extent to which he himself explicitly located the theorist in his materialist outlook. Lukács critiqued the revisionists who divorced theory from practice, thereby replicating the reified divisions of the social order. Instead, 'in the teeth of all these isolated and isolating facts and partial systems, dialectics insists on the concrete unity of the whole.'⁴²² In this account totality is not a nostalgic unity imposed by the theorist, as Jay suggests, but the movement of the system as a whole, and any critical examination of Lukács must start from his contention that 'the unity of theory and practice is only the reverse side of the social and historical position of the proletariat. From its own point of view self-knowledge coincides with knowledge of the whole so that the proletariat is at one and the same time the subject and object of its own knowledge.'⁴²³

Despite its shortcomings, Jay's critique does get at a key dilemma in Lukács's approach, one that is linked to his aesthetic theory. 'Historical materialism', Lukács argues, 'grows out of the "immediate, natural" life-principle of the pro-

421 Jay 1984, pp. 11–14. Jay's use of the term 'Western Marxism' comes from a critical engagement with the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Perry Anderson, and others (see especially Anderson 1977). He shares their primary strategy of describing Western Marxists primarily in terms of their personal histories and relationships to political movements, in particular the failure of revolutionary projects in Western Europe in the aftermath of 1917; this leads to an often odd conglomeration of diverse figures under that rubric.

422 Lukács 1968, p. 6. Lukács does, however, exempt 'nature' and 'science' from the social totality. 'When the ideal of scientific knowledge is applied to nature it simply furthers the progress of science. But when it is applied to society it turns out to be an ideological weapon of the bourgeoisie' (1968, p. 10). Nature and science thus remain beyond ideology.

423 Lukács 1968, p. 20.

letariat; it means the acquisition of total knowledge of reality from this one point of view ... The self-knowledge, both subjective and objective, of the proletariat at a given point in its evolution is at the same time knowledge of the stage of development achieved by the whole society'.⁴²⁴ The intellectual, and even more so the Party, occupies a strange position in this construction, simultaneously guaranteeing and guaranteed by the totality. It is important to emphasise that Lukács is not arguing that intellectuals 'speak for' the proletariat: '[o]nly the consciousness of the proletariat can point the way that leads out of the impasse of capitalism'.⁴²⁵ But it is the case that intellectuals occupy a pivotal position in this process, a position that comes out clearly in his description of the role of the Party. 'In this process [the constitution of the proletariat as a class through revolution] which it can neither provoke nor escape, the Party is assigned the sublime role of *bearer of the class consciousness of the proletariat and the conscience of its historical vocation*'.⁴²⁶ It is in times of crisis, as he argued in an essay from 1919, that 'consciousness' is driven or carried by specific leaders, Lenin being the key example.⁴²⁷

Lukács here eschews a pure spontaneity such as that which grounded the politics of the KAPD, but also a simple notion of Party leadership. Instead, the Party is characterised in the language of aesthetics, as a bearer of 'the sublime'. The affinity between his political and aesthetic theories is evident here, but it leaves the Party occupying an impossible position, marking the locus of an as yet absent proletariat as subject and object of history. We can read this as an expression of what Lukács argues is the two-fold nature of *Capital*. Revisionists, he says, miss the fact that Marx theorised a 'pure' capitalism in order to strategically unfold the historical nature of the capitalist system. By itself (without the concreteness of historical materialism) this is a false totality, enabling 'vulgar materialists' to 'take the facts in abstract isolation, and explain them only in terms of abstract laws unrelated to the concrete totality'.⁴²⁸ The Party thus marks this point at which the abstract and the concrete come together, but the impossibility of this position, which in fact can only be occupied by the proletariat, requires Lukács to turn to the abstract language of the

424 Lukács 1968, p. 23. Lukács's discussion of Kant and bourgeois philosophy traces this argument at the level of the intellectual, arguing that bourgeois intellectuals are only capable of resolving epistemological and ontological dilemmas at the level of thought; the proletariat does so through practice (pp. 114–21).

425 Lukács 1968, p. 76.

426 Lukács 1968, p. 41.

427 Lukács 1972, pp. 17–18.

428 Lukács 1968, pp. 8–10, quote p. 9.

sublime. Crucially, this is a term that in its Kantian use signals a boundlessness and transcendence of the sensual body.

Harry Liebersohn argues that in this sense Lukács's work is of a piece with the German sociological tradition. 'Lukács' insistence on the absolute reification of the proletariat unconsciously acknowledged that its redemption originated beyond the world of things. By finding its truth in the moment of its absolute alienation, Lukács conveyed an unabated longing for transcendence of man's social condition: the hope that accompanied German sociology throughout its history and reached its purest expression in his work'.⁴²⁹ While Liebersohn does not mention Expressionism, his argument shows the extent to which, despite his virulent critique of the movement, he shares with it an underlying desire for transcendence. However, I would argue that Lukács's desire is at once more radical than this tradition, and that he also loses an important aspect of its critical potential. He is more radical because, as I have already argued at length, he offers a historical materialist response to the voluntarist and individualising conception of transformation that structures the desire for redemption. What he loses in the process, though, is the critical conception of totality implicit in Simmel's work. The price of Lukács's materialist critique of Simmel's sociology and of Expressionism is the installation of a pristine proletarian totality.

Lukács's work, as Henri Lefebvre argues, involves a shift in spatio-temporal logic. 'In Georg Lukács's anti-Hegelian Hegelianism, space serves to define reification, as also false consciousness. Rediscovered time, under the direction of a class consciousness elevated to the sublime level at which it can survey history's twists and turns at a glance, breaks the primacy of the spatial'.⁴³⁰ In theorising totality as non-apprehensible, on the other hand, Simmel refuses this sublime closure. Lukács's conception of the proletariat as the embodiment of the social totality is the tie that binds. In Simmel's account, the intellectual is not made to bear the same weight, the irreducible fragmentation of the social totality preventing this closure. His totality is open, and the position of the theorist is, in both senses of the word, partial. This is also where Benjamin took up, his conception of revolution as a rupture of the temporal continuum profoundly different than a class consciousness magisterially surveying history's twists and turns.

For Moishe Postone, this problem in Lukács stems from a fundamental misreading of Marx. While both, he argues, 'appropriate Hegel's concept of the identical subject-object, the differences between them are fundamental.

429 Liebersohn 1988, p. 194.

430 Lefebvre 1991, p. 22.

Lukács grasps the concept socially as the universal class, the proletariat, whereas Marx does so as the universal form of mediation, capital. What for Lukács is the basis for emancipation, the future, is for Marx the basis of domination, the present'.⁴³¹ The working class in this reading of Marx can be the vehicle for the abolition of capital, but it is not in and of itself the subject and object of history. Capitalism itself has a contradictory and dialectical structure, but that structure is internal to the system. Thus, Postone continues, 'Marx's analysis, within this framework, suggests that any theory that posits an intrinsic developmental logic to history as such, whether dialectical or evolutionary, projects what is the case for capitalism onto history in general'.⁴³² Through his conception of the proletariat and totality, Lukács does precisely this.

Postone's argument strengthens that of Liebersohn in that he shows how Lukács's desire for a redemptive moment is rooted in a misreading of Marx. This misreading, I would argue, is of profound importance to a Marxist theory of the body. As I argued in the introduction to the book, Marx posits that human species being is rooted in a metabolic exchange with(in) nature in which the body is central. Labour is the mechanism by which this exchange happens, but under capitalism this labour becomes alienated, taking on the contradictory character that, as Postone argues, is endemic to capital. The rationalising practices of the body that flow from ideas of degeneration emerge out of and as a response to this capitalist logic. In this context Lukács's notion (cited earlier) that culture is bound up with organic national being is profoundly troubling. This is especially the case given his tendency to read art and culture as a surrogate for the sublime working class. There is a powerful slippage here in which his theorisation of the working class as the subject and object of history is embodied as a kind of transcendent national subject.

Lukács's emphasis on a seamless proletarian totality thus works against the embodied Marxism that I have been arguing for in this book. Rather than being grounded *in* the body, Lukács's conception of the proletariat can be read as a flight *from* the body. We can see this in his engagement with Kant, whose greatness, he argues, is that he represented the contradictions of bourgeois subjectivity and freedom 'with no attempt to conceal the intractability of the problem by means of an arbitrary dogmatic resolution of any sort, but that he bluntly elaborated the contradiction and presented it in an undiluted form'.⁴³³ While Kant could only present the contradiction, its resolution comes with the proletariat as the subject and object of history. The Kantian position that

431 Postone 2003, p. 89.

432 Postone 2003, p. 96.

433 Lukács 1968, p. 134. See pp. 121–34 for his broader discussion of Kant.

Lukács takes up here, and indeed the European philosophical tradition more broadly, is grounded in the dualism of body and mind, nature and subjectivity. In Kant, Lukács argues, '[t]he "eternal, iron" regularity of the processes of nature and the purely inward freedom of individual moral practice appear at the end of the *Critique of Practical Reason* as wholly irreconcilable and at the same time as the unalterable foundations of human existence'.⁴³⁴ In concluding the section on 'Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat', he reframes this in Marxist terms.

The objective economic evolution could do no more than create the position of the proletariat in the production process. It was this position that determined its point of view. But the objective evolution could only give the proletariat the opportunity and the necessity to change society. Any transformation can only come about as the product of the – free – action of the proletariat itself.⁴³⁵

The eternal, iron regularity of nature, which in Marx, as we saw in the introduction, is dialectically constituted through human bodily labour, is here counterposed to free action. This move reinstates a dualism in place of Marx's dialectic, in the process suppressing material bodily practices and making them the locus of fragmentation and partiality.

As we saw earlier in the chapter, the conception of totality that flowed from Lukács's argument was challenged by Bloch in the context of the Expressionism debates. Bloch invoked a very different understanding of totality. His was an expressive totality that resonated with critical practices seeking to subvert the reified structures of capitalist modernity, but resisted any fixing of the nature or scope of that totality.⁴³⁶ In Bloch's Expressionism, the moment of transcendence was a structural impossibility. We can see a similar movement in Benjamin's thought.⁴³⁷ His critique of progressivist readings of history has

434 Lukács 1968, p. 134.

435 Lukács 1968, pp. 208–9.

436 Freeman 2006 argues that Bloch's ontology of not-yet-being has much in common with Dadaist practice, in particular that of Hugo Ball. There is much to recommend this view, especially given both Bloch's and Ball's proximity to Expressionist conceptions of culture and politics, but the argument also misses the Marxist influence in Bloch's work that is entirely absent with Ball.

437 Already in his very early work, 'The Life of Students', for example, Benjamin held to a more concrete notion of aesthetic totality. He argued that '[e]veryone who achieves strives for totality, and the value of his achievement lies in that totality – that is, in the fact that the whole, undivided nature of a human being should be expressed in his achievement. But

affinities with Postone's argument in stressing that this historical logic is internal to the structure of capitalism. Benjamin's own relationship with Lukács was complex in this respect. As David McNally argues, referring especially to the period of 1924–25 when Benjamin was working on *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*,

Benjamin never entirely subscribed to this last part of the Lukácsian schema [the proletariat as the subject and object of history]... [H]e found the problem of revolutionary subjectivity much more complex and difficult than its depiction in *History and Class Consciousness*. Nevertheless, much of Lukács's argument resonates with his thinking at the time. In particular, Benjamin was already moving toward a view of modern society as a nightmare of reification. And, similarly, he was increasingly impelled toward a position of *immanent critique* – searching for redemptive powers within the degraded world of the profane, not outside it.⁴³⁸

This degraded world was that of the fragment, the ruin – and this is what Benjamin's 'tiger's leap into the past' aims to excavate. 'The same leap in the open air of history', he argues, 'is the dialectical one, which is how Marx understood the revolution'.⁴³⁹

Benjamin's later *Arcades Project* stands as a final monument (or more accurately given his critiques of monumental culture, an anti-monument) to his increasingly rigorous Marxist analysis. Its fragmentary form has affinities to Simmel's *Philosophy of Money*, and to Schwitters's *Merzbau*, but unlike these works, it does not take the sphere of circulation, of money and objects as its starting point. Like Lukács, Benjamin theorises from the perspective – if often hidden – of the proletariat. This proletariat is not, however, the pristine future unity of *History and Class Consciousness*, but the suffering proletariat, the generations of 'enslaved ancestors' to which he refers in the 'Theses on the Philosophy of History'.⁴⁴⁰ He has a profoundly dialectical conception of totality and fragmentation – that of nostalgia and shock. In aesthetic terms, Benjamin

when determined by our society, as we see it today, achievement does not express a totality; it is completely fragmented and derivative' ('The Life of Students', in Benjamin 1996, p. 39). Here he is quoting from a speech that he gave to a student audience arguing for the need for an independent student movement.

438 McNally 2001, p. 172. On Benjamin's attention to the fragment, see pp. 171–78.

439 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', in Benjamin 1968, p. 261.

440 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', in Benjamin 1968, p. 260.

was thus drawn to movements, like Dada or Surrealism, from which Lukács's critical realism turned resolutely away. This difference was also evident in the aesthetics and politics of embodiment, where, as we saw at the beginning of the chapter, Benjamin turned to marginalised figures rather than the heroic proletariat for inspiration. For Benjamin, a sense of the totality could only be apprehended immanently through constellations of its fragments, grasped in the fleeting flash of recognition characteristic of the dialectical image rather than in the plenitude of a working class as the subject and object of history. His conception of totality thus took up Lukács's challenge to non-Marxist conceptions of fragmentation, but retained a powerful resistance to any closure.

Bodies and Minds: Art and the Politics of Degeneration

4.1 Introduction

In a vivid passage in her *Junius Pamphlet* of 1915, Rosa Luxemburg argued that the War had uncovered the true nature of capitalism:

The cannon fodder that was loaded upon the trains in August and September is rotting on the battlefields of Belgium and the Vosges, while profits are springing, like weeds, from the fields of the dead ... Shamed, dishonored, wading in blood and dripping with filth, thus capitalist society stands. Not as we usually see it, playing the roles of peace and righteousness, of order, of philosophy, of ethics – as a roaring beast, as an orgy of anarchy, as a pestilential breath, devastating culture and humanity – so it appears in all its hideous nakedness.¹

This passage gives us a very particular vision of the embodiment of a militarised capitalism, one very different from the patriotic unity promoted by the state or the pristine armoured bodies dreamt of by Jünger and others on the radical right. Across the political spectrum, critics imagined that the War would unmask the true nature of society; for Luxemburg, that unmasking revealed only corruption and horror.

We might read Luxemburg's beast as a grotesque parody of the *Volkskörper*, her account challenging the 'spirit of 1914' at a time when that spirit was still able to inspire. Luxemburg presents a degenerate social body, but locates the source of that degeneration in capitalist social relations. If we set this image beside the bodies of the soldier-males of the radical right discussed in the second chapter, the distinction is especially clear. Those bodies were produced through the externalisation of purported sources of degeneration, their violent purging in rituals of masculine hardness directed at a series of enemies, not least the left and Luxemburg herself, who was murdered in the counter-revolutionary frenzy of early 1919. In the *Junius Pamphlet*, workers' bodies, their material death and decay, do not give rise to new men but literally fertilise

1 'The Junius Pamphlet: The Crisis in German Social Democracy', in Luxemburg 1970, pp. 261–62.

capitalist profit. The ideological cover of pristine bourgeois order, of hygiene, is torn away in war, exposing the filth through which it is dialectically constituted. Luxemburg's imagery may have offended many at the time of writing but, as I detailed in the second chapter, her vision of war as a hideous beast resonated with more and more people as the War went on, particularly those artists and writers whose politicisation was shaped by their experience of war. This was unsurprising given the material bodily violence of the War on both fronts.

The War remained a key theme throughout much of the Weimar period, shaping many critical cultural responses to capitalist modernity. George Grosz's *The Faith Healers* (Ill. 3) is a famous example of anti-war art that also draws out the complex intersections of military and medical practice. Initially drawn during the War as part of his ironically-titled collection *God is With Us*, *The Faith Healers* was reprinted in the Dadaist journal *Die Pleite (Bankruptcy)* in 1919. Faced with a skeleton, the doctor proclaims 'kv', the acronym for the notorious diagnosis of *Kriegsverwendungsfähigkeit* (fit for active service) pronounced by doctors on wounded or ill soldiers. The satire is blunt, with the doctor's willingness to proclaim the fitness of the skeleton underscoring the voracious appetite of the military for virtually any body to throw into the fight. This bodily dimension is emphasised by the contrast between the well-fed officers and the emaciated future soldier, a distinction that played on struggles over the classed differences in military provisioning. The intimate relationship between medicine and the military (the synthetic and the analytical branches, as the doctor in Ernst Toller's *Transformation* put it) is symbolised by the two prominent crosses worn by the medical staff, the Red Cross on the orderly's sleeve and the Iron Cross on the doctor's coat.

Walter Mehring parodied the medicalised conception of national health and wholeness through a similar invocation of the diagnoses of kv in the inaugural issue of the Dadaist journal *Der blutige Ernst (Bloody Earnestness)*.

In the year 1914 the outbreak of the health-promoting (*gesundenden*) world war turned all medical knowledge on its head through a fundamental discovery: How sweet it is to die with God for king and capital. One will be healed again à la Christ: At the command of their superior, the lame walked and the deaf heard. Our dear God revealed himself daily in the wonder formula 'k.v.', and the overburdened doctors, who marched armies out of the military hospitals, were relieved by state-approved faith healers and prosthesis-cobblers.²

2 Mehring 1919, p. 3.

DEN ÄRZTEN VON STUTTGART, GREIFSWALD, ERFURT UND LEIPZIG GEWIDMET.



4 1/2 Jahre haben sie dem Tod seine Beute gesichert; jetzt, als sie Menschen das Leben erhalten sollten, haben sie gestreikt. Sie haben sich nicht geändert Sie sind sich gleich geblieben. Sie passen in die „deutsche Revolution“.

ILLUSTRATION 3 George Grosz, *Die Gesundheitsbeter* (The Faith Healers), 1916–17, pen, brush and india ink, 50.8 × 36.5cm.

This work was reprinted in a number of places with different titles. This version is from the magazine Die Pleite (April 1919), with the writing around the image added by the editors. It also appeared in Grosz's collections Gott mit uns (1920), Das Gesicht der herrschenden Klasse (1921), and Die Gezeichneten (1930). The caption above reads: 'Dedicated to the Physicians of Stuttgart, Greifswald, Erfurt, and Leipzig.'

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The 'spirit of 1914', the basis of so many dreams for the regeneration of German culture, is reread here as medical and hygienic praxis. Linking the two is the twinned logic of degeneration and religion, each proclaiming the possibility of miraculous transformation. Writing in the same issue of *Der blutige Ernst*, Richard Huelsenbeck turned the diagnosis of degeneracy back on the *Volkskörper*, arguing that war was the result of a 'cretinism' that demonstrates 'the moral inferiority of the Germans'. Only Dada, he argued, can provide the needed therapy: '[o]nly the anti-doctor (Dada-doctor), the great despiser of molecular weight and the barbs of theorems who is completely convinced of the cretinism of the Germans and who exists only through resistance against Germanness – only he can help'.³

As Brigid Doherty notes, Dada's trajectory was framed in various ways through medical metaphors. Critics saw their work as a source of degeneration and a sign of failing national health, while Dadaists themselves embraced and reversed these diagnoses, seeking to produce a counter-psychoanalysis and counter-medicine. Huelsenbeck's piece in *Der blutige Ernst*, as well as Raoul Hausmann's article in the same issue, thus rejected psychiatry and psychoanalysis for their role in sustaining the military effort.⁴ Dadaists also saw montage as a form of radical surgery producing hybrid bodies and subjectivities that mimicked those produced by capitalist labour, in commercial culture, and through the violent destruction of the battlefield.⁵ The Dadaist *Volkskörper* was grotesque, replicating the 'hideous nakedness' of capitalist modernity that, as Luxemburg argued, had been exposed by the experience of war; Dada had only to claim it as its own. In some respects, Dada's militant mimesis entailed an anti-ideological reading of capitalism; its brutality was not hidden, but in plain sight. This was the realism that, as I noted in the previous chapter, Lu Märten ascribed to Dada, but it was also an aesthetic that the communist left had trouble endorsing.

Dadaists and other radical artists focused on the brutality of militarist hygiene, but their critique extended far beyond to a critical engagement with broader capitalist notions of hygiene. For some Dadaists, this meant an engagement with the politics of work. As we shall see, in a host of ways Weimar bodies were enmeshed in social relations of labour that were configured around notions of 'fitness' for work, kv in this context taking on additional

3 Huelsenbeck 1919, p. 13.

4 Huelsenbeck 1919; Hausmann 1919c. Richard Sheppard discusses Dada's hostility to Freudian psychoanalysis, drawing instead, as we saw in the previous chapter, on the work of Otto Gross (2000, pp. 185–86).

5 Doherty 1998, pp. 74–78.

meanings. Alienated labour was increasingly enmeshed in managerial schemes of regulation closely linked to social hygiene and eugenics. Otto Dix, himself of working-class background, captured aspects of alienated labour in his portraits of workers in the early 1920s, while Albert Birkle's quasi-religious images depicting the torn and broken bodies of workers highlighted the physical impact of the labour process. Conrad Felixmüller's paintings focused especially on Ruhr coal miners, his works developing a complex and ambivalent portrayal of working-class male bodies, depicting both the bodily impact of routinised and exploitative work, and the potential social power stemming from that labour.⁶ Felixmüller's canvases reflect his political commitments as one of the post-Expressionist artists to join the KPD, remaining a member from 1919 to 1924.

At times these depictions of labouring bodies moved close to the realist heroism or suffering that communist art critics so often looked for, with avant-garde techniques remaining muted. On the whole, though, Expressionists, Dadaists, and other post-Expressionists tended to shy away from engagements with labour. Depictions of alienation tended to focus instead on urban life, mimicking the sociological critique of modernity that we saw with Georg Simmel. The result was a profoundly ambivalent critical practice. On the one hand, capitalism and capitalist social relations tended thereby to recede into the background. Lukács's denunciation of the Expressionist obsession with the superficially fragmentary and shocking was directed at these tendencies. On the other hand, as I argued in the previous chapter, modernist and avant-garde concerns with bodily difference and transgression led Expressionists to a complex engagement with embodiment often missing on the left. Certainly their emphasis on play and bodily pleasure as emancipatory practice was looked on askance by most KPD-affiliated critics. Avant-garde fascination with the grotesque, with bodies that refused to conform to the dictates of hygienic and moral social norms, thus opened up important critical perspectives, even while artists often fetishised these bodies and ignored the extent to which they were enmeshed in the logic of capital.

These avant-garde engagements with the body will form the focus of this chapter. What did it mean that the avant-garde articulated aesthetic and political critiques through the proliferation of non-normative bodies? What were the implications for the emancipatory projects to which these artists often staked a claim? How can we critically engage with the avant-garde production of images of bodily difference that all too often rendered them

6 See Türk 2000, pp. 242–87, for a discussion and rich collection of images of workers in Weimar art.

unproblematically in the language of degeneration? In asking these questions I do not mean to suggest that post-Expressionist artists were uniform in their approach. As I will argue in this chapter, some radical cultural practices tended to reproduce dominant conceptions of degeneration, while others worked to undo this logic. Often both tendencies were at work. In order to trace out the implications of the avant-garde politics of embodiment, this chapter thus situates their work in extended discussions of the social history and politics of the Weimar period.

The chapter begins again from the perspective of the War. As I have suggested in earlier discussions, the experience of War had a profound impact on many artists during the Weimar period, shaping their conceptions of post-War bodies. The bulk of the chapter looks at these bodies, focusing on several key figures that populated the work of the avant-garde: the prostitute, the disabled veteran, the insane, the primitive. These figures were central not only to post-Expressionist artists, but in the culture and the politics of the period as a whole. Artistic productions thus need to be read in part as interventions, sometimes deliberate sometimes unintentional, into a contested symbolic and material order. Thus, for example, the second and third sections of the chapter will elaborate on the gendered construction of the body through two key figures – the prostitute and the disabled veteran. Both, and especially the former, as I argued in the second chapter, emerged as central to debates over moral regulation, and as symbols of modernity in the culture of the period. Thus, many post-Expressionists portrayed prostitute bodies as ubiquitous markers of urban degeneration, a tendency extended to disabled veterans as well. Both tended to be figured as grotesque, their bodies crystalising the profound gendered anxieties of the post-War years. If, as I argued in the second chapter, the War saw a reorientation of social order along the lines of the fighting and the home fronts, the disabled veteran and the prostitute were the shadows haunting each.

The prostitute and the disabled veteran were only rarely presented as social actors or as emancipatory figures, reduced instead to the roles of degenerate threat or symbolic victim. For the avant-garde, two other figures emerged instead as prominent symbols for the emancipatory radicalism that artists sought to claim: the insane and the primitive. These two figures, which I will discuss in the last two sections of the chapter, were no less burdened than those of the prostitute and the disabled veteran, but they were oriented somewhat differently in the aesthetic imagination of the avant-garde. Artists tended to identify themselves and their practice much more explicitly with madness and the primitive in a way that they did not with sex workers and disabled veterans. Madness and primitivity were made to embody an immediate, pre-conscious creative energy that artists sought to mobilise in the service of artistic and, in some cases, political radicalism. In both cases these tropes

represented attempts to reverse the logic of degeneration, although to what extent this reversal undid that logic is an important question that will be considered here. Especially in the case of madness, the experience of war complicated the debates. The immense psychological impact of the War on soldiers and non-soldiers, captured for the former in the new diagnosis of 'shell shock', had a major impact on how madness was configured over the course of the Weimar period, both by artists and in Weimar culture more broadly.

Primitivism was in many respects the most significant tendency underlying modernist and avant-garde art, presented as a source of creative liberation from the artificial, alienating, and repressive character of modern life. Given its deep links to colonial practices, we can see in primitivism as well the deeply racialised nature of the culture of the period. But, as I will argue in this chapter, we need to understand 'race' in a broad sense here. Indeed, racial ideas infused the politics of embodiment in all its manifestations. As I discussed previously, debates over population politics (*Bevölkerungspolitik*), eugenics, and social hygiene were conceived of through the lens of race. This was the politics of the *Volkskörper*. Thus, ideas of the primitive brought together the various other themes traced in this chapter, linking them in a shared discourse of racial hygiene.

It was not only or even primarily in the realm of art that we can see these discourses in action, however. The ideas of degeneration we can read out of artistic works were primarily found in popular, medical, and scientific conceptions of bodies. In those discourses, the threat of disease so often linked to prostitution or the perceived degenerative impacts of physical or cognitive differences were consistently configured as threats to a national and racial body. Here too, though, the aesthetic dimension was central, with scientific literature invoking aesthetic categories in conceptualising bodies. Thus, conceptions of hygiene were themselves fundamentally aesthetic in nature. In this context, art needs to be read not simply as a reflection of social practices, but rather as deeply implicated in the production of, and contestations over, embodied politics. This chapter will therefore juxtapose artistic with other social practices as a way of illuminating these complex relations. While often replicating dominant ideas of degeneration, some artists also opened up spaces within which profoundly emancipatory projects that incorporated a critical engagement with the body could be imagined.

4.2 (De)militarised Bodies: Art and Gender after War

Otto Dix's drawing *Prostitute and War Wounded* appeared in the Dadaist journal *Die Pleite* in 1923 under the name *Two Victims of Capitalism*, accompanied

by a short verse from the nationalist war-poet Gustav Falke (Ill. 4). The image depicts two graphically disfigured faces, that of a prostitute and a wounded soldier. The prostitute's gaunt face, topped with a parody of a fashionable hairdo, is marked by syphilitic sores, while the wounded soldier stares terrified out of his one remaining eye, his massive gaping wound testimony to the enduring violence of the War.⁷ Otto Dix was not the only Weimar artist to deploy images of sex workers and war wounded in response to the War or to the depredations of modern, urban life; they ran through the culture of the period. For Willi Wolfradt, writing in 1924, Dix thus 'lets a whore and a war cripple, arm in arm, cast a damning judgment on their century'.⁸ Maria Tatar, however, argues that the gendered figures produce a rather different response to modernity. Especially in his massive works *Metropolis* (1927–28) and *War* (1929–32), Dix 'contrasts between the nobility of fallen men and the corruption of fallen women'.⁹ The implied viewer of his work is male, and he deploys the prostitute to provoke a violent aversion on the one hand, while offering the soldier as the locus for a possible, if ambivalent, identification on the other. *Two Victims* thus provides a synoptic image of a crisis of masculine embodiment and subjectivity in which the danger of degeneration and bodily fragmentation is ever-present.

The accompanying verse in *Die Pleite* ironically situates this masculine crisis in relation to the nationalist upsurge during the War. Falke's poem, written in the early years of the War, reads:

'O blood of the sons!' 'O Fatherland!'
 'O Germany!' Thus do they both stammer
 And step into a glorious fire
 The joy with the sorrow.¹⁰

Falke was one of many poets who had flocked to the nationalist banner during the War, captivated by the 'August experience' that I described in the second chapter. The juxtaposition of this typically melodramatic nationalist verse with the maimed figures in the image produced a critical tension challenging the idea of the *Volkskörper* implied by Falke's lyric. The title of the image,

7 Maria Tatar argues the wounds link the two gendered bodies, 'the one bearing syphilitic facial sores that look like bullet wounds, the other displaying war wounds that resemble female genitals' (1995, p. 81).

8 Quoted in Büttner 2012, p. 74.

9 Tatar 1995, p. 81.

10 The verse is from 'Hand in Hand', in Falke 1916, p. 128.



ILLUSTRATION 4 *Otto Dix, Dirne und Kriegsverletzter (Prostitute and War Wounded), 1923, pen and ink on paper.*
© ESTATE OF OTTO DIX/SODRAC (2014). IMAGE COURTESY OF THE OTTO DIX FOUNDATION, VADUZ.

Two Victims of Capitalism, also directs the critical charge at capitalism. Thus, the damaged bodies of the work are put in the service of a critique of the destructive nature of capitalism and of hygienic ideas. However, neither the title nor the verse came from Dix; both were additions by the editors of *Die Pleite* that imposed a much more concretely political meaning on the image than he had necessarily intended. More broadly, even with these additions, but especially without, the work relies on a stigmatising and grotesque rhetoric of disability and an implicitly violent misogyny as the vehicle for critique.

Later in the chapter I will return in greater detail to the specific figures of the prostitute and the wounded or disabled soldier. Here, though, I want to look more closely at the crisis of masculine subjectivity expressed in Dix's politically ambivalent work. Dix was one of the most prominent artists to emerge in the Weimar period, with his work still held up as exemplary of the cultural ferment of those years. He was one of many artists who participated in the transition from Expressionism through Dada to the 'post-Expressionist' art associated with the period of economic stability in the mid-1920s.¹¹ While he was associated with Dada, and despite *Two Victims* appearing in the communist-oriented *Die Pleite*, Dix was rather apolitical. He looked more to Nietzsche than to Marx for inspiration, and never joined the KPD or other political organisations. Indeed, he actively strove to situate himself above politics, proclaiming in 1920 that he was 'neither political nor tendentious nor pacifist or moralistic in some fashion'.¹² It was an amorphous humanity rather than a specific social system that was indicted in his often-misanthropic work.

Dix's work is best understood in the context of artistic developments in the Weimar period more broadly. While too diverse to truly represent a coherent school, much of the art of the middle-Weimar years came to be characterised as part of the *neue Sachlichkeit* movement, which is translated as 'new objectivity' or 'new sobriety'. The *neue Sachlichkeit* has generally been seen as reflecting the economic situation. Where the fragmented images of Expressionism or the shocking interventions of Dada were the product of periods of political and economic upheaval, what followed was a cooler, more rationalised, and geometrical aesthetic. Photography, as we shall see in the next chapter, played a central role in these aesthetic shifts. The political implications of these shifts were complex, with the *neue Sachlichkeit* rejected by many on the left for

11 The term comes from Roh 1925.

12 Quoted in Gutbrod 2009, p. 43. Schmidt 1999, pp. 12–15 emphasises the influence of Nietzsche. See also Lofthouse 2005, pp. 43–101, who interprets Dix's Nietzschean roots in terms of Vitalism, the *Lebensphilosophie* that was so prominent in early twentieth-century Germany.

divorcing art from politics. Ernst Toller, for example, argued in 1930 that the new movement reflected the artificiality of the new age, contrasting it negatively with Expressionism:

Based on the recognition that the environment, so to speak, sinks deeply into the artist and cuts many facets into his psychic mirror, the Expressionist wanted to photograph more than appearances, and wanted to shape this environment from within its essence in new ways... The epoch of Expressionism was replaced by the New Objectivity and that art form they called Reportage. I believe that the *Neue Sachlichkeit* was a modern form of 'Biedermeierism'; the artist of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* was not close to men and things, but merely to the photography of them.¹³

This association of the movement with the apolitical bourgeois aesthetic of the early nineteenth-century Biedermeier era was not uncommon, with Adolf Behne drawing a similar comparison.¹⁴

Whilst Toller distinguished the *neue Sachlichkeit* from Expressionism, Theodor Adorno contrasted it with Surrealism, which he saw as a more politicised type of art.

Childhood images of the modern era are the quintessence of what the *Neue Sachlichkeit* makes taboo because it reminds it of its own object-like nature and its inability to cope with the fact that its rationality remains irrational. Surrealism gathers up the things the *Neue Sachlichkeit* denies to human beings; the distortions attest to the violence that prohibition has done to the objects of desire.¹⁵

For Benjamin, writing especially of its literary manifestations, the *neue Sachlichkeit* marked an extension of the 'left-wing melancholy' of the radical intelligentsia that had earlier given birth to Expressionism: '[t]he metamorphosis of political struggle from a compulsory decision into an object of pleasure, from a means of production into an article of consumption – that is this literature's latest hit'.¹⁶ This aestheticisation of the political meant that neither

13 'Arbeiten', in Toller 1978, 1, pp. 137–38.

14 Adolf Behne, 'Die neue Sachlichkeit oder der unsterbliche Biedermeier', in Sabina Becker 2000, pp. 296–98 (originally published in 1927).

15 Adorno 1991, p. 90. He goes on to argue that Surrealism itself is out of date as people are now denying themselves even the consciousness of this denial.

16 'Left-Wing Melancholy', in Benjamin 1999b, p. 425.

Expressionism nor the *neue Sachlichkeit* were able to bridge the widening gulf between the radical intelligentsia and the working-class movement.

More recent accounts share these critical perspectives on the *neue Sachlichkeit* movement. Jost Hermand argues that the movement 'stood for a precisely calculating business sense for which the competitive battle for profits was the only social regulator. This battle for profits was supposed to be the most important notion on the path to democracy, eliminating all other ideas of value'.¹⁷ In this context, 'lifestyle' and image became the dominant modes of (self-)representation, a superficiality that has led others to characterise the *neue Sachlichkeit* as a reflection of Weimar's broader 'surface culture'.¹⁸ However, Dennis Crockett questions Hermand's reading, arguing that it flattens significant distinctions within the movement and, by dating it from 1924, excludes earlier examples that show a much greater diversity of political and artistic perspectives.¹⁹

The designation *neue Sachlichkeit* was introduced by Gustav Hartlaub in 1925 in his exhibition of the same name. In the preface to the exhibition catalogue, Hartlaub stressed that while the new movement signalled a turn to concreteness in art, this could have a range of connotations and political directions. Already in a 1922 article, Hartlaub had argued that post-Expressionist art included a right- and a left-wing, the first governed by classical impulses, '[t]he other, left wing, glaringly contemporary, much less believing in art, born rather out of the negation of art, looks with primitive determination to declarations and nervous self-exposure to reveal chaos, the true face of our time'.²⁰ This left perspective, he therefore argued in 1925, 'is tearing actual things out from the world of real events, evoking experience in its actual tempo, its specific heat'.²¹ Whether right or left, the *neue Sachlichkeit* shifted away from the ecstatic visions of transformation produced by Expressionists, and towards a more documentary practice that engaged directly with broader contexts of mass culture.

Hartlaub identified Constructivism as one of the most significant of these left-wing movements. Indeed, as I will discuss at greater length in the next chapter, László Moholy-Nagy, Hans Richter, and other members of the

¹⁷ Hermand 1994, p. 60.

¹⁸ Siegfried Kracauer was the most prominent critic of this surface culture. See also Ward 2001; Lethen 2002.

¹⁹ Crockett 1999, pp. 1–6. See also Simon 1980.

²⁰ Quoted in Kappelhoff 2003, p. 122.

²¹ G.F. Hartlaub, 'Preface to catalogue of Neue Sachlichkeit exhibition, Mannheim', in Long 1993, p. 291.

Constructivist International were deeply engaged in debates over the radical political potential of art throughout the Weimar period, looking especially to new media such as photography and film for inspiration. Richter had been involved with the Dada movement, later translating experiments in montage to his own work in film.²² The documentary approach was even more evident in 'reportage', the movement derided by Toller in the passage cited above for being merely factual. Often this was the case, with some looking uncritically at the commercial press for inspiration. Thus, Hermann Hieber argued in 1928 that in the new illustrated newspapers, time is compressed into an eternal present in which '[a]rt and literature ally themselves with the absolute latest, with politics'.²³ Others, most famously the left writer Egon Erwin Kisch, developed reportage as a critical practice. Kisch argued that 'there is nothing more sensational in the world as the time in which one lives!';²⁴ seeking to mobilise this sensationalist impulse in the service of the working-class movement rather than, as was the case with the press, commercial gain.

As we saw with Lukács and the Expressionism debates in the previous chapter, conceptions of a critical or documentary realism were crucial to the radical aesthetics that emerged in the period. As we shall see in the next two chapters, it was especially in relation to new media such as photography, film, and the press, that new cultural practices developed on the left. Realism in this context did not necessarily imply a simple documentary approach, however. For Siegfried Kracauer, any unmediated conception of reality should be rejected, arguing in *The Salaried Masses*, his own 1930 documentary report on the times:

A hundred reports from a factory do not add up to the reality of the factory, but remain for all eternity a hundred views of the factory. Reality is a construction. Certainly life must be observed for it to appear. Yet it is by no means contained in the more or less random observational results of reportage; rather, it is to be found solely in the mosaic that is assembled from single observations on the basis of comprehension of their meaning. Reportage photographs life; such a mosaic would be its image.²⁵

Rather than a pure documentary form, for Kracauer a critical cultural practice requires an amalgam of reportage and montage that refuses both Toller's desire for authenticity and the fetish of the up-to-date. Indeed, the critical

22 Finkeldey 1998, pp. 105–11.

23 Hermann Hieber, 'Reportage', in Becker 2000, p. 188.

24 Kisch, 1924, p. viii.

25 Kracauer 1998, p. 32.

media practices of Dada can be read in precisely this context, as an attempt to both mimic and subvert the journalistic form.

In addition to Hartlaub, Carl Einstein, Paul Westheim, Wilhelm Hausenstein, and other critics at the time designated the new current of critical documentary realism as 'Verism'.²⁶ Einstein argued that Verism in fact grew out of Dada, its critical realism demonstrating the grotesqueness of the real itself. Dix was frequently identified as a Verist, although this designation imputed to him a left politics that, as I have suggested, in reality was muted. Dix was part of the generation of male artists born in the early 1890s who served at the front, and whose artistic practice was shaped not only by Expressionism, Futurism, and other emerging modernisms, but also by the experience of war.²⁷ Dix himself saw his first combat in late 1915, and throughout the War he produced a host of drawings, eventually numbering some 600, through which he sought to reproduce the front experience.²⁸ While these drawings were unknown at the time, and not rediscovered until 1962, they provide a powerful insight into Dix's own artistic development, as well as the crises in aesthetics and subjectivity engendered by the First World War. For Dix, the experience of war was profoundly ambivalent, both incredibly destructive and also embodying an awesome power. As he remembered in a 1963 interview, '[t]he war was a horrible thing, but there was something tremendous too'.²⁹

26 Barton 1981, pp. 6–7; Fleckner 2005, pp. 66–67. McGreevy 2001, p. 200 argues that 'Critical Realism' better describes the style, although she does not use the term in a strictly Lukácsian sense.

27 Crockett 1999 gives this description of this generation of male artists: 'most were born between 1890 and 1895 [Dix was born in 1891]. They grew up during the reign of Wilhelm II. They found their faith in Nietzsche, were informed of gender differences by the master misogynist Otto Weininger, and were entertained by Karl May [a widely-read colonial adventure writer]... and pulp literature. Their visual sensibilities may have been ignited by the illustrated *Witzblätter* (satirical journals) like *Simplicissimus*... and by the nickelodeons that featured violent adventure films. They studied at art academies during the secessionist and countersecessionist wars, and came to sympathize with the Expressionist youth movement. Their artistic careers were probably put on hold in August 1914. Their generation paid the greatest price during World War I. On 9 November 1918 it may have seemed that their youths had been wasted' (pp. 35–36).

28 On the military dimensions of Dix's work, see especially McGreevy 2001. Tate 1998, in particular her chapter on 'Vile Bodies' (pp. 64–95), looks at a number of the themes that I take up here in the English context. Paret 2001, pp. 133–43 stresses that, given censorship and other constraints of war, it was really only afterwards that, both in visual art and in popular culture, the battlefield came to be publicly rendered in ways that escaped from the controlled representations of that state and military.

29 Quoted in Eberle 1985, p. 22.

Already in these wartime sketches, the landscape of war was naturalised through its expression of a timeless gendered dynamic. In his war diary, Dix wrote: '[u]ltimately all wars are fought over and for the sake of the vulva',³⁰ a perspective evident in his drawings. These drawings frequently depicted shell-holes and trenches in vaginal terms. In some cases these were cast in a nostalgic vein, as with his pastoral depiction of the front in *Shellhole with Flowers*, but they also worked to feminise the violence of war. This violence was perhaps most evident in his 1914 drawing, *Walpurgis Night* (Ill. 5). Here war is depicted as a witch's Sabbath, women appearing as the embodiment of militarised violence, an orgy of war translated into a vision of proliferating, fleshy female bodies. *Leuchtkugel* (1917, Ill. 6) embodies a similar dynamic to *Walpurgis Night*, except that in this case the bodies are male. They are the passive victims here, their flesh blown apart by the force of the exploding shell. By rendering his men passive, Dix configures them as victims of the feminised excess portrayed in *Walpurgis Night*, a grotesque and highly sexualised femininity; the prominence of the witches' genitalia in particular graphically illustrates his association of the violence and chaos of war with an unruly and degenerate female sexuality.

A number of authors have noted similarities between the work of Dix and Ernst Jünger, especially evident in their common gendering of the violent dynamics of war.³¹ There are differences, however. For the radical right, as we saw in the second chapter, the technological assault on the earth transforms it into an alienated man-made landscape on which the new man is born. As Klaus Theweleit argues, for the radical right, '[p]rocreation occurs when the hard core of men (the nation) blasts away "Mother" Earth, tearing her apart and penetrating her in warrior fashion, "fertilizing" her interior with streams of blood... War is a process that regenerates both the nation and the soldier male himself'.³² Dix's landscapes of the front deploy a similar violence, but the gendered implications shift. Male bodies are the passive flesh on which a feminised violence is enacted, with Dix's work marked by what might be called an over-production of women, a proliferation of images of engulfing women. His urban landscapes are similar in this respect, as we shall see in the next section, but in them male agency returns, expressed often as an extreme violence against women.

As Maria Tatar argues, Dix drew on traditional tropes of a maternal earth, but rendered them profoundly ambivalent in procreative terms; the feminised

30 Quoted in Eberle 1985, p. 41.

31 See, for example, Eberle 1985, pp. 31–39; Tatar 1995, pp. 78–79; McGreevy 2001, pp. 318–19.

32 Theweleit 1989, 2, p. 88.

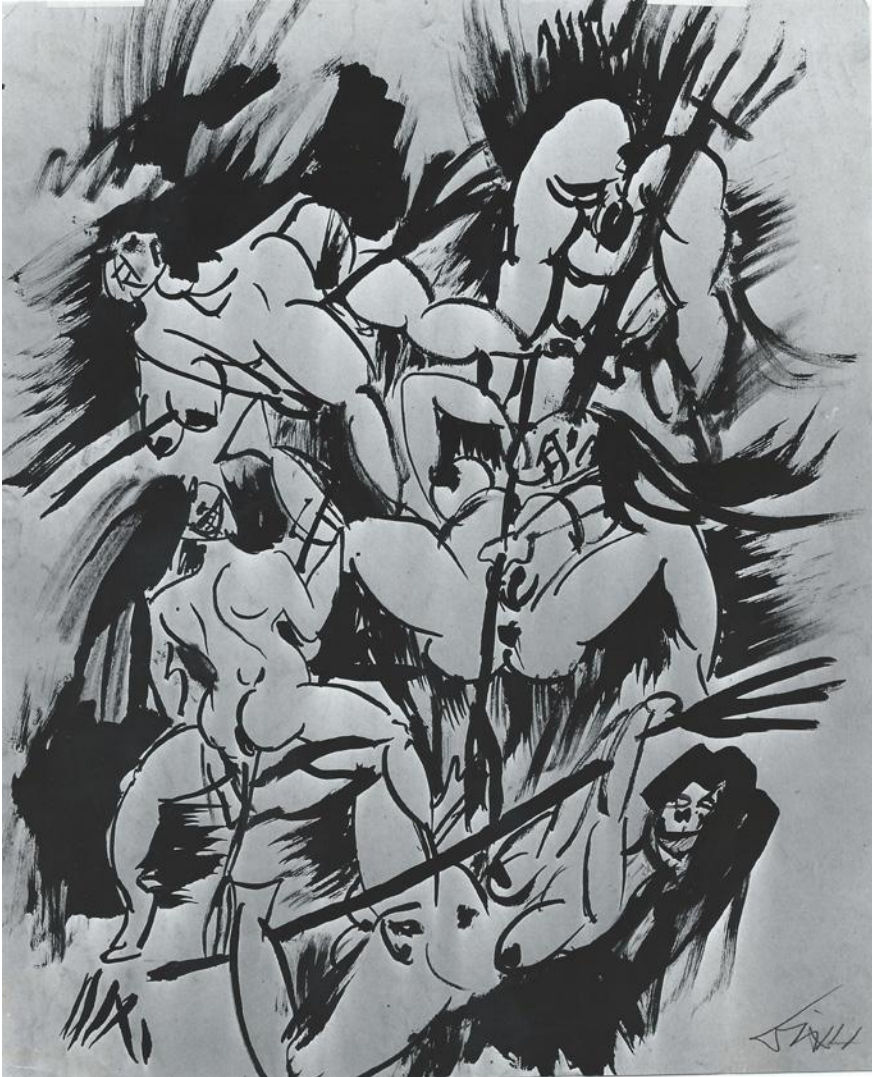


ILLUSTRATION 5 *Otto Dix, Walpurgisnacht (Walpurgis Night), 1914.*

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ILLUSTRATION 6 Otto Dix, *Leuchtkugel (Flare)*, 1917, *gouache*.

© ESTATE OF OTTO DIX/SODRAC (2014). IMAGE

COURTESY OF THE OTTO DIX FOUNDATION, VADUZ.

earth was simultaneously life-giving and life-threatening.³³ Older traditions of painting were influential in this respect, with Dix especially interested in the religious paintings of Grünewald.³⁴ Stronger than these classical influences, however, was a powerful documentary impulse that ran through his work. Dix went to great lengths to ensure documentary exactitude, such as spending time in hospitals studying corpses and body parts as models.³⁵ Photography also played a key role here, with Dix relying on photographs of wounded

33 Tatar 1995, pp. 75–79. Sabine Gruber (1999) argues that Dix's later portraits of women, in particular those of Anita Berber (1925) and the dancer Tamara Danischewski (1933), embodied a much more critical conception of gendered social relations. In his depictions of war from the same period, however, he continued to deploy the themes first traced here.

34 Beck 1996.

35 McGreevy 2001, pp. 278–79.

soldiers that were extensively published in medical literature of the period; the soldier in *Two Victims*, for example, was adapted from such photos. It is this documentary approach that led to his frequent designation as a Verist.

Dix's grotesque visions were thus conceived of as documents of war, a form of reportage that he extended to his depictions of the urban landscape as well. As the critic Carl Einstein argued in 1923, Dix's images were concerned with objectivity (*Sachlichkeit*), but they traced a reality that was itself corrupt; Dix 'gives kitsch right back to the bourgeois from whom it came'.³⁶ The extent to which this documentary approach hit home was evident in responses to his work. His massive 1923 work *The Trench* (Ill. 7), shown first at the Prussian Academy of Arts in Berlin and then purchased by the Wallraf-Richartz-Museum in Cologne, generated a national controversy. The painting was condemned for its bloody depiction of the front, with nationalists denouncing its anti-militarism and negative portrayal of the German soldier.³⁷ Here we see the difference between Dix and the radical right. For Jünger, as we saw in the second chapter, death marked the moment of transcendence and the fulfilment of the logic of total mobilisation. In *The Trench*, however, death is passive, the grotesque, contorted, and shocking bodies of soldiers becoming the landscape itself.

This naturalisation of death shaped Dix's documentary realism. While he is often read as a pacifist artist, this is not always directly evident in his work. In the case of his collection of drawings *Der Krieg* (*The War*) from 1924, it was the framing provided by others, as had been the case with *Two Victims* and the editors of *Die Pleite*, that gave it a strong pacifist bent. The tenth anniversary of the outbreak of war in 1924 saw a strong pacifist mobilisation led in particular by the War Veterans' Peace Alliance (*Der Friedensbund der Kriegsteilnehmer*) and the 'never-again-war' movement ('Nie-wieder-Krieg-Bewegung').³⁸ Dix's dealer, Karl Nierendorf, turned *The War* into a major success by promoting it as anti-war despite Dix's own ambivalent relationship to war.³⁹ This ambivalence was evident in the responses to the anniversary as well, with the divisions evident during the War still resonating in the official state commemoration. At the public ceremony Friedrich Ebert, the SPD leader who was now the German president, gave a speech reaffirming the SPD's collaborationist politics during

36 'Otto Dix', in Einstein 1996, 2, p. 344.

37 Apel 1997, pp. 373–75; McGreevy 2001, pp. 231–34.

38 Lütgemeier-Davin 1981.

39 In his memoirs, Dix describes how his documentary curiosity allowed him to overcome the fear he felt at going to the front: 'I had to experience that all very precisely. I wanted to. In other words, I'm not a pacifist at all. Or maybe I was a curious person' (quoted in McGreevy 2001, p. 274).



ILLUSTRATION 7 *Otto Dix, Der Schützengraben (The Trench), 1920–23, oil on canvas, 227 × 250 cm. The original painting is now lost. This photograph shows The Trench as it was displayed in the Nazi exhibition of ‘Degenerate Art’ at the gallery of the Munich Hofgarten in 1937.*

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the War and emphasising the importance of national unity. The speech was to be followed by two minutes of silence, but it was interrupted by communists shouting anti-war slogans; right-wing activists responded with the nationalist hymn *Die Wacht am Rhein* (*The Guard on the Rhine*).⁴⁰ It was these political differences over the nature of the War that were almost entirely absent from Dix's work itself, despite the ways in which it was framed by others. Dix's concern in his depictions of war was almost exclusively with its significance in terms of a crisis of the male body and subjectivity, one that ignored the social and political contexts I traced in the second chapter.

40 Whalen 1984, pp. 32–33.

Questions of gender ran through most critical responses to the War, including in the work of more explicitly pacifist artists, as well as in more politicised works. Käthe Kollwitz's perspective provides both a notable contrast to Dix's, but also one that also draws on gendered conceptions that are not unlike his. This is perhaps a controversial claim. Kollwitz, who remains one of the most famous of the Weimar artists, was a much more passionate pacifist than Dix, and also focused on the War's impact on women. Nevertheless, there were some mutually reinforcing tendencies in their respective conceptions of gender that are instructive for thinking about the aesthetics of embodiment in the period. In 1923 she too produced a cycle entitled *War*, and participated actively in the anti-war events of the following year. Thematically and stylistically her *War* cycle was dramatically different from Dix's. Kollwitz's *War* series began with an image entitled *Sacrifice* (*Opfer*, which also means victim) depicting a woman holding out a baby (Ill. 8). This was followed by an image of male volunteers going to war, and then various scenes of elders, widows, and grieving mothers, before ending with *The People* (*Das Volk*), represented by a mother and child surrounded by others (Ill. 9). Unlike Dix's graphic depictions, violence remains behind the scenes in Kollwitz's work, the grief and loss permeating the drawings gesturing towards a brutality that remains hidden. It is women's experience that is the focus here.

Where Dix retained a profoundly ambivalent relationship to war, shaped by both horror and fascination, Kollwitz's work was much more direct in condemning it. Despite these differences between the two artists, Kollwitz's work, both in *War* and elsewhere, tended to share a naturalised conception of gender with Dix. Women appear as the passive bearers of suffering in Kollwitz's *War*, with only the image of the male volunteers suggesting a dynamic movement. In this respect, Kollwitz's work reflected a critique of war as male practice shared by many pacifists, in particular women. As Roger Chickering argues, 'according to the pacifists' analysis, the social and political subordination of women was itself the product of the state's having to prepare for war by cultivating manly virtues'.⁴¹ For many of the pacifist feminists discussed in the second chapter, most prominently Lida Gustava Heymann and Anita Augspurg, the deployment of feminine values could thus act as a counterweight to these destructive forces.⁴² Underlying these arguments was an essentialist notion of gender difference that was especially evident in Kollwitz's maternalist imagery. She reverses the gendered dichotomies that run through Dix's work, with women

41 Chickering 1975, pp. 165–66.

42 See, for example, Heymann 1980, an essay on 'Feminine Pacifism' written in 1917, banned by the censors, and only published in 1922.



ILLUSTRATION 8 Käthe Kollwitz, *Das Opfer* (Sacrifice), plate 1 of the series *Krieg* (War), 1922, published 1923, woodcut, 37.2 × 40.8 cm.

© ESTATE OF KÄTHE KOLLWITZ/SODRAC (2014). DIGITAL
IMAGE © THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART/LICENSED BY
SCALA/ART RESOURCE, NY.

appearing primarily as passive victims of war rather than its underlying cause, but the underlying logic is similar in its tendency to naturalise gendered characteristics. We can see this in the fact that, as Gisela Schirmer notes, both artists depicted pregnant women or women with children in similar ways;⁴³ the main difference was that Dix produced relatively few such images, with most of Dix's women appearing as prostitutes, symbols of the violence of war, or bodies on which sexualised violence was enacted.

In Kollwitz's case, her depiction of women as passive developed out of her experiences of the War. She was older than Dix, having been both artistically and politically active long before the War, her fame dating back to her 1897 etchings depicting the 1880s Silesian weavers' uprising. In these earlier works, women were depicted as active participants in a broader working-class

43 Schirmer 1998, pp. 214–19.



ILLUSTRATION 9 *Käthe Kollwitz, Das Volk (The People), plate 7 of the series Krieg (War), 1922, published 1923, woodcut, 37.2 × 40.8 cm.*

© ESTATE OF KÄTHE KOLLWITZ/SODRAC (2014).

DIGITAL IMAGE © THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART/LICENSED BY SCALA/ART RESOURCE, NY.

struggle, tying class and gender together in a dynamic constellation. While Kollwitz continued to identify with workers and the working-class movement, the experience of war shifted her conception of gender. She never felt the 'spirit of 1914' as strongly as so many other artists and intellectuals, but she did support both the War and her son Peter who volunteered.⁴⁴ Peter's death early in the War affected her deeply. As she wrote in her diary in October 1920:

I was a revolutionary, my dreams of childhood and youth were of revolution and barricades. In my youth I was certainly a communist . . . but I am now in my 50s, I have lived through the war with the death of Peter and

44 Apel 1997, p. 380.

thousands of other young people, I am horrified and shaken from all the hatred that exists in the world. I long for a socialism which lets people live and finds that the earth has seen enough of murder, lies, ruin, disfigurement, in short, of everything diabolical. A communist order that builds itself on the latter cannot be God's work.⁴⁵

Rather than the active revolutionaries of her earlier work, her woodcut of a dead Karl Liebknecht, the murdered Spartacist leader, demonstrates her changed vision of communism (Ill. 10). In the woodcut, Liebknecht appears as a quasi-religious figure, his head wreathed in a halo of light and the gathered crowd bowed reverentially before him. Not only is the work passive but, as Wieland Herzfelde argued in a sharply worded critique, the image fails because none of the figures surrounding her are workers. Herzfelde goes further, arguing that even in her earlier work in the weavers' series, Kollwitz 'was a portrayer of suffering, the oppressed, she had nothing to say about change!'⁴⁶

Gisela Schirmer agrees that the differences between Kollwitz's earlier and later work are not as pronounced as many argue, but she also contends that the reading of Kollwitz's closed and naturalised conception of maternalist femininity is rather overdrawn.⁴⁷ What Kollwitz took from her own experience was not simply a notion of maternal suffering, Schirmer suggests, but rather a powerful sense of responsibility for having supported her son's enlistment. The *War* cycle, then, should be read as a self-reflexive critique of maternal responsibility for enabling the prosecution of war, and thus in fact a partial indictment of the passivity of the maternalist ideology that generated this support. In this reading, Kollwitz's passive women are rather more complex, their passivity embodying a subordinated position to which Kollwitz responded with understanding but also resistance.⁴⁸ Hers was a documentation of suffering, a kind of reportage that differed from Dix's in its humanist orientation and in its nostalgic tone. But, while different, the works of the two artists can also be read

45 Quoted in Fritsch 1999, p. 286.

46 Herzfelde 1996, p. 44.

47 As Schirmer 1999, p. 111 points out, the debates over the use of Kollwitz's sculpture *Mother with Dead Son* in the *Neue Wache* memorial in Berlin in 1993 have strengthened this interpretation of her work. The memorial was dedicated to *all* the victims of war by Helmut Kohl's government, leading to a controversy in which the government was rightly criticised for presenting a sanitised image of war that ignored the major differences between kinds and degrees of victimisation, a debate in which the Holocaust played a key role (on the 1993 debates, see Stölzl 1993).

48 Schirmer 1999, pp. 111–21.

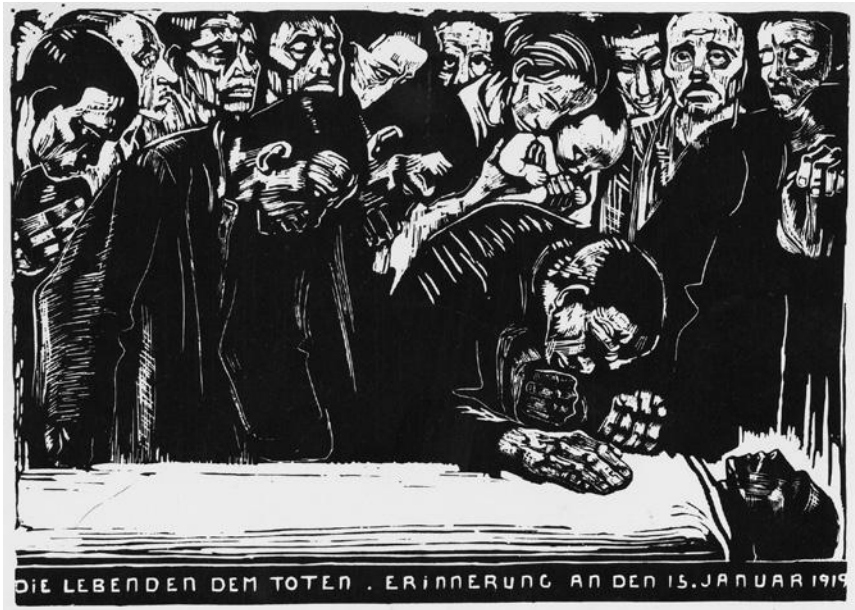


ILLUSTRATION 10 Käthe Kollwitz Gedenkblatt für Karl Liebknecht (Memorial page for Karl Liebknecht), 1919. An alternate title is *The People Cry over Karl Liebknecht's Death*. The caption reads: *'The Living to the Dead. In Memory of 15 January, 1919.'*

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as twinned expressions of the crises of gendered subjectivity produced by the War. Dix speaks with the voice of the fighting front, Kollwitz the home front.

Kollwitz was not the only one who took up a maternalist perspective. Berta Lask's wartime poem 'The Mother of the Fallen Son' depicts a passive, bereaved mother sitting trance-like at the news of the death of her son.⁴⁹ Lask's politics, however, shifted dramatically over the course of and after the War. She turned increasingly to the left, eschewing her earlier passive depictions and urging women to mobilise against the War. In the immediate aftermath of the War 'A Call to Women' was published in the SPD organ *Vorwärts*, in which Lask argued for a revolution that included a feminist activism.⁵⁰ The incipient critique of women's passivity and complicity in war that Schirmer finds in Kollwitz became much more explicit in Lask's work. Her growing radicalism led Lask from social democracy through the pacifist-anarchism of Ernst

49 Cardinal 1993, p. 212.

50 Sheppard 1992, pp. 280–81.

Friedrich, whose work I will discuss later, and then to communism; she joined the KPD in 1923.⁵¹ Her 1929 short story 'Women in Battle: A Story from the World War' offers a strong contrast with her earlier depictions of passive suffering. Looking back on women's wartime activism, the story traces an incident in which women, driven by hunger but also by their political commitment, lead strike support, thereby integrating gender struggles with class politics under the banner of a socialist revolution.⁵²

As noted in the second chapter, the mobilisations during the War were part of a broader shift in gendered social relations in which the dynamics of home front/fighting front produced a shift away from patriarchal social relations. This is reflected in interesting ways in the work of both Dix and Kollwitz. Fathers do not appear in Kollwitz's work. The primary familial relationships are between mothers and sons, with female passivity and suffering most commonly represented in relation to an absent rather than an active masculinity. Masculinity is a present absence that denotes a point of loss (the death of husbands and sons), but also the source of militarised violence itself. Dix's work goes even further, with familial relations, aside from some notable exceptions, almost entirely absent.⁵³ Even more than Kollwitz, in whose work the patriarchal family is retained as an absence, Dix reproduced the gendered logic of the two fronts in which, as we saw in the second chapter, the patriarchal family is displaced. In Kollwitz's work, coming as it does out of the home front, mothers are prominent. In Dix's work, coming out of the fighting front, mothers are largely absent, with male bodies represented as wounded, disabled, or dead, and women figured primarily as prostitutes. These two figures, the prostitute and the disabled veteran, were each enmeshed in complex ways in debates over degeneration, social hygiene, and social welfare. They dominated not only Dix's work, but also much of the visual culture of the Weimar period. It is to these figures that I will turn in the next two sections.

4.3 The Prostitute

Otto Dix obsessively returned to the prostitute body as the site of his often violent musings on war and urban life. The sheer quantity of these works is remarkable: between 1918 and 1925 Dix produced approximately 13 paintings,

⁵¹ Cardinal 1993, pp. 208–17; Colvin 2003, pp. 104–5.

⁵² Lask 1980.

⁵³ Here is another similarity with Jünger who, as we saw in the second chapter, had almost nothing to say about the family in his depictions of leaves from the front.

60 watercolours, nearly 200 drawings, and 15 graphic works with sex workers as their main subject.⁵⁴ This by no means exhausts his production of prostitute bodies, as they appear incidentally in many of his other works as well. In this he was not alone, however. Prostitutes populated the work of radical artists, especially male artists, throughout the Weimar period. Appearing alongside the overstuffed bourgeoisie, pompous militarists, lurking criminals, and other denizens of the urban street, the prostitute provided a key with which these artists sought to unlock the meanings of capitalist modernity. In this respect, they were following a much broader social concern with prostitution that, as I argued in the second chapter, was at the heart of the politics of degeneration, and that gained even greater prominence during the War.

Dix's painting *Old Prostitute* suggests a number of the many meanings layered onto the prostitute body in the period (Ill. 11). Subtitled *Venus of the Capitalist Age*, this work produces the prostitute body as an allegory of capitalist modernity. As we saw in previous chapters, this use of the prostitute body was not uncommon. Benjamin, for example, saw her as a powerful example of a dialectical image: '[s]uch an image is the prostitute – seller and sold in one'.⁵⁵ In Dix's work, however, any implicit critique of capitalism is submerged under the grotesque. It is the aged female body in *Old Prostitute*, not exploitative social relations, that provides its charge, simultaneously attracting and repulsing the viewer. The prostitute's garish garments are incapable of covering up the grotesque flesh beneath, while her clothing and makeup suggest an artificiality commonly associated with femininity, accentuating rather than hiding her nakedness. She embodies a sexual availability, but her age and appearance render her pathetic rather than desirable, a contradiction captured in the ironic 'Venus' of the title. Ostensibly a marker of capitalism, this Venus stands instead for the degeneracy of female bodies and sexuality, her agency abolished in her objectification. The implied viewer here can only be male.

Dix's canvases were produced in a context in which prostitute bodies were overdetermined sites of cultural and political contestation, in particular in relation to conceptions of aesthetics and degeneration. This was evident in Dix's 1923 obscenity trial over a different painting, *Girl at the Mirror*, which depicts a prostitute on display, her breasts and genitalia visible through her scant clothing. Its showing led to Dix's arrest, but based in part on supporting testimony from art professors, he was acquitted. His defence was based on his documentary aesthetic I discussed earlier. In response to the judge's

54 Barton 1981, p. 41.

55 'Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century', in Benjamin 1999a, p. 10.

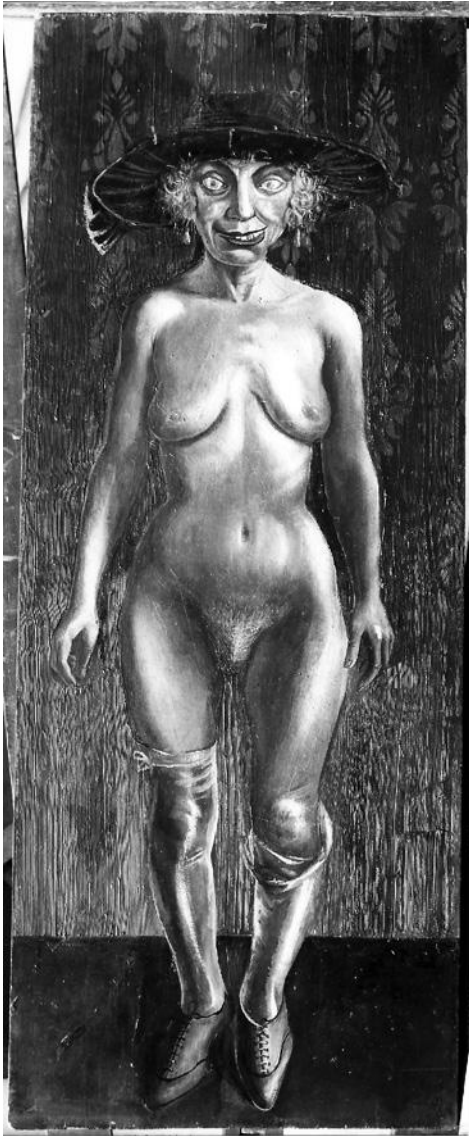


ILLUSTRATION 11

Otto Dix, Alte Dirne (Venus des Kapitalistischen Zeitalters) (Old Prostitute [Venus of the capitalist age]), 1923, oil on plywood, 128 × 50 cm.

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IMAGE COURTESY OF THE OTTO DIX FOUNDATION, VADUZ.

question as to whether he could have made a less crudely 'realistic' depiction, he responded:

I believe even that I have not yet depicted things and their ghastly effect realistically enough. The image was meant to depict the opposite of the body of a healthy, pure human being. I considered it necessary to depict the body in such a way that everyone who sees the image would necessarily feel pity and revulsion, and would see the necessity for such a state of affairs to be eliminated in any way possible.⁵⁶

The court accepted the argument, agreeing that the obscenity lay not in the image, but in the 'ugly and haggard body of the prostitute [*Dirne*]'. As the judge said, Dix

was clearly wanting to show the decay [*Verfall*] that the sex trade inflicts after a certain time on the human body. With that, by having visibly painted the pubic hair and buttocks, he wanted to strengthen the cautionary impression through an exceptional realism of the representation and the subsequently heightened deterrent effect. Wanting to stimulate the senses of the male viewers was far from his intention.⁵⁷

Dix may have been telling the judge what he wanted to hear in his defence, but his success in avoiding conviction highlights the complex nature of debates over aesthetics and degeneration. The question on which the trial turned was about the mode by which the painting engaged with the degenerate body; Dix successfully argued that his painting was untainted by the obscenity it depicted because it retained a documentary and hence pedagogical function. The painting was artistically legitimate because it did not provoke crass sexual desire in a male audience. The judgement thus accepted a certain artistic autonomy, but art was understood as a pedagogical and social hygienic instrument. As I will discuss at greater length in the next chapter, these debates over obscenity, grounded in ideas of social hygiene, raged in all areas of cultural production in the period, especially around photography, film, and other forms of mass culture. Producers of mass media, as we shall see, often did not have recourse to the same arguments as they were not deemed to be producing 'art'. The judgement in Dix's trial implied a class and gender hierarchy, with art granted

56 "Mädchen am Spiegel" – Otto Dix freigesprochen', in Schmidt 1978, pp. 202–3. The trial transcript was published in 1923 in the *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger* newspaper.

57 "Mädchen am Spiegel" – Otto Dix freigesprochen', in Schmidt 1978, p. 202.

a greater leeway because its assumed audience of 'bourgeois' men were more capable of assimilating controversial content and maintaining the distance required by the documentary aesthetic.

Gendered aesthetic judgement functioned in a different way here as well. What is notable in both Dix's and the judge's comments is the elision of the codes of art and the body. The 'hateful' aesthetic qualities of the prostitute body in the painting are transposed onto the bodies of sex workers themselves, read as a product of a 'degenerate' life. Yet what this judgement inadvertently highlights is the central role played by aesthetic distinction in the production of ideas of bodily health and degeneration. The prostitute body in this sense formed a locus where we can clearly see the ways in which very different domains – aesthetics, social policy, crime, censorship – intersected in complex ways. Given the widely-held view that, as the influential criminologist Erich Wulffen argued in 1910, 'prostitution is a product of urbanisation',⁵⁸ it is no accident that sex work became one of the most prominent sites for the regulation of gendered bodies in German cities, as well as a common cultural symbol for the degeneracy of urban life.

In the case of Dix's trial, then, his art was admitted as part of the range of hygienic interventions through which, as we saw in the second chapter, sex work was conceptualised and regulated. As I noted there, the two main approaches were regulation and abolition. In both cases, although with different emphases, education was seen as an important policy response, with organisations like the German Society to Combat Venereal Disease (DGBG) playing this role. It was this approach that Dix argued he was furthering with his art. Before looking in more detail at the cultural politics of sex work in the period, it is therefore useful to return briefly to look at the elaboration of political and policy responses to prostitution in the Weimar period, which continued to be shaped by the contestations between regulationist and abolitionist approaches. Both tendencies drew heavily on the argument that sex work was a symptom of modern urban life, with responses like *Kasernierung*, the spatial containment of sex work in specific areas of the city, an attempt to remake the landscape of the city through the regulation of sexuality and the bodies of workers. More broadly, this regulation had as its target the health of the *Volkskörper*, the social body as a whole.

Class played a key role in the regulation of sex work, with the practice of *Kasernierung* restricting sex work and workers to specific areas of the city. This involved the state identification of 'prostitutes', the constitution of fixed identities that determined the parameters of life and work. Located primarily within

58 Wulffen 1910, p. 677.

working-class districts, such areas were thus doubly stigmatised, and it was working-class women who were policed most heavily. Crucially, it was bourgeois activists, often women, who sought to 'help' sex workers, their interventions part of broader projects for the regulation of women's and working-class lives. Over the course of the Weimar period, the dominant approach shifted, with regulation coming under increasing attack from abolitionists who sought to 'rescue' sex workers from their situation.

This 'rescuing' approach was especially evident with abolitionists who were instrumental in setting up Welfare and Rescue Centres (*Pflegeämter*) in different municipalities in the aftermath of the War, and who rejected the regulationist approach. The orientation of these centres varied significantly, with some cooperating with police vice squads, and others coming into conflict with police and other officials, but between 1918 and 1927 the approach they promoted gradually undermined the regulationist system that had dominated prior to and during the War. As with other social welfare institutions, the centres were promoted by SPD activists in concert with more liberal bourgeois women's organisations. In 1927 the SPD and bourgeois abolitionist women's groups pushed the Reichstag to pass the Law to Combat Venereal Diseases (*Reichsgesetz zur Bekämpfung der Geschlechtskrankheiten* [RGBG]) that made the Welfare and Rescue Centres part of the state social welfare apparatus.⁵⁹ The law was unpopular with conservative and religious groups as well as the police, with conservatives tying opposition to their broader anti-republicanism.⁶⁰

The centres and the social welfare approach to sex work were designed to identify and rescue 'endangered women' (*Gefährdete*). Rescue work targeted sex workers, but also those deemed to be most likely to succumb to prostitution: youth, working-class or poorer women, women from rural areas or smaller towns who were moving to the city, and those employed as maids or in other forms of housework.⁶¹ These perspectives were ambivalent in how they conceptualised prostitution, with a social understanding shading easily into essentialist notions of the prostitute. This dichotomy is captured in Hans Ostwald's lavishly illustrated and popular *Cultural and Moral History of Berlin*. He suggested that there were two kinds of prostitutes – poor women and 'true' prostitutes. 'The woman worker goes into the street because she earns too little',⁶² but, he argued, there is also 'a kind of girl that to a certain

59 For overviews of Weimar prostitution policy and debates, see Roos 2001; Stubbs 2001.

60 Roos 2001, pp. 312–46.

61 Stubbs 2001, pp. 77–90.

62 Ostwald 1926, p. 633.

degree can only be described as a prostitute'.⁶³ This latter idea of the 'born' prostitute dominated much popular discourse, and was reflected in the art of Dix and others, but also underlay the social hygienic conception of prostitution in which class was closely linked with degeneration. All of these different conceptions of sex work – notions of 'endangered women', associations with disease and bodily decay, class – emerged in Dix's trial.

Over the course of the Weimar period, then, the licensing and containment of sex work through practices like *Kasernierung* was largely abolished, with the vice squad replaced by welfare police reporting to health authorities. This reflected the RGBG's focus on 'disease' as a source of danger, with the law giving doctors exclusive rights to treat STIs. These shifts represented not only a change from criminal to medical approaches to sex work, but also the victory of doctors over their rivals in homeopathic or other alternative forms of medicine.⁶⁴ The implications of these changes were complex. While many of the measures adopted were repressive, some abolitionists also rejected the 'double morality' that, as we saw in the second chapter, treated women's sexuality differently from that of men.⁶⁵ Such a perspective opened up space for a critical approach that, while reductive in its understanding of sex work, could offer a less restrictive approach. Thus, Julia Roos argues that for all its problems, the welfare-based approach led to some important improvements for sex workers, most notably giving them access to greater civil rights. The restrictions on their movements and behaviour that we saw in the second chapter were largely lifted, and they were less directly subject to police authority. At the same time, however, sex work remained stigmatised, with coercive interventions directed instead by health and welfare authorities.⁶⁶

The RGBG was in many ways a victory for the broader social welfare approach on which the SPD staked its reformist political claim throughout the Weimar period. While this approach placed some emphasis on the social and economic contexts of sex work, SPD activists shared with abolitionists a tendency to conceptualise prostitution in terms of pathology, an approach that the RGBG cemented. We can see both the social and the pathological approaches in the work of the radical abolitionist Alice Rühle-Gerstel. She

63 Ostwald 1926, p. 638.

64 Stubbs 2001, pp. 92–147; Roos 2001, pp. 183–202.

65 Stephanie Wichert's short 1929 biography of the early British abolitionist Josephine Butler celebrated this aspect of the movement, stressing her emphasis on 'purity' and the ways in which state laws (in that case the Contagious Diseases Act) exacerbated the loss of purity (Wichert 1929).

66 Stubbs 2001, pp. 130–40.

argued that poverty formed a crucial enabling context, but prostitution itself represented an absolute negation of human being:

What she [the prostitute] guards and cultivates, protects and preserves, is emptiness, meaninglessness, sterility. Thus, in its furthest extreme, in the prostitute who stands at the margins of society, the idea of care meets its absurd opposite. The place of prostitution is a nihilistic non-place. The prostitute produces the downfall and preserves nothingness; that is her position relative to work.⁶⁷

While Rühle-Gerstel held this powerfully reductive and stigmatising understanding of prostitution, her abolitionism was part of a broader project undertaken with her husband, the prominent left-radical Otto Rühle, for the transformation of the working-class and the formation of 'new people'. For her, then, the critique of prostitution was not in the service of reactionary notions of the family, but was part of a programme that involved the radical transformation of the family, including the abolition of parental authority and the introduction of collective child-rearing.⁶⁸ Crucially, though, and as the last part of the passage above suggests, for Rühle-Gerstel prostitution was emphatically not conceptualised as a form of labour. Indeed, its radical negativity was the opposite of work, producing nothing.

In these different examples, we can see that the stigmatisation of sex work ran through a wide range of political projects, its regulation or suppression conceptualised in each case as part of a broader desire for the regeneration of individual and social bodies. Even in the case of a sex-radical like Magnus Hirschfeld, the great proponent of the decriminalisation of homosexuality, we can see this logic at work. He was extremely active in resisting repressive measures against sex workers and in supporting sex worker organisations, but he still tended to interpret prostitution as part of broader practices of sexual repression. Although Hirschfeld provided eloquent testimony detailing the hardship workers faced, he saw prostitution, especially male prostitution, as reflective of 'innate' tendencies. This characterological view of male prostitution split the Scientific-Humanitarian Committee, the main organisation fighting for homosexual rights, with others like Kurt Hiller and the communist Richard Linsert stressing social and economic factors.⁶⁹

67 Rühle-Gerstel 1932, p. 270.

68 Mikota 2003, pp. 149–51.

69 Ramsey 2008, pp. 95–96.

This latter perspective was especially important in allowing for a more nuanced conception of sex work that could in some cases include a labour-based approach. The criminologist, police inspector, and sexual reformer Gotthold Lehnerdt developed one of the most detailed typologies of sex work that was quite profound in stressing the extent to which state intervention reproduced and reinforced class hierarchies. Thus, what he called 'the prostitute of the little man',⁷⁰ those who catered to the working class, were especially vulnerable to various forms of abuse arising from state regulations and policing. Lehnerdt details the daily humiliations entailed by the system of registration and control imposed by police, with specific focus on the intrusive violence of compulsory medical exams.⁷¹ 'We do not need an official guardian of morality', he argued, 'especially not in the form of the police'.⁷² Indeed, for the DGBG's social-democratic dermatologist Alfred Blaschko, sexual morality itself had a class basis; he repeated Bebel's argument that the bourgeois concern over 'legitimate' and 'illegitimate' sexual activity was primarily about inheritance and property relations, pressures that the working class did not share.⁷³

For some radicals, however, these social and economic understandings of sex work were taken much further, challenging dominant stigmatising approaches in their entirety. Margo Klages-Stange shared Lehnerdt's concern over the impact of policing, but extended this analysis in arguing that 'the prostitute' needed to be seen as the product of that policing system itself. Determining the scope of prostitution was difficult, she wrote in 1926, 'because only professional prostitutes are included in the statistics. These are either women whose behavior has attracted the attention of the vice squad or women who have submitted, voluntarily and unceremoniously, to supervision'.⁷⁴ A 'professional prostitute', in other words, was constituted through her interpellation into police discourses and practices. Crucially, any behaviour that fell outside sexual and social norms opened women up to the risk of being identified as a prostitute. This reductive identity formation was at odds with working-class women's own experience. As Lynn Abrams argues, '[o]ccasional resort to prostitution in their early twenties seems not to have meant a lifetime of stigmatization. They expected to be, and were, able to return to working-class society,

70 Lehnerdt 1926, p. 176.

71 Lehnerdt 1926, pp. 176–82.

72 Lehnerdt 1926, p. 249.

73 Roos 2001, pp. 234–36.

74 Klages-Stange 1994, p. 728.

discarding the label prostitute'.⁷⁵ In this view, then, we see a very different conception of sex work, one that acknowledged it as one form of labour.

What distinguished the work of Lehnerdt, Hirschfeld, and a few others was their engagement with sex workers themselves. Lehnerdt argued that for all the often hateful talk about prostitution, 'only infrequently and only very carefully has anyone dared to assess prostitution as an aspect of life, and to see people who serve with their bodies as what they are, as people'.⁷⁶ Elga Kern's book *Wie Sie dazu Kamen (How They Got There)* marked an especially important contribution to these debates, compiling the stories of 35 women working in brothels. The book was published the year after the RGBG abolished such regulated prostitution, and remained one of the few published sources that included sex-worker voices.⁷⁷ While these voices were rarely recorded in this way, it is nevertheless clear that workers themselves frequently agitated to reshape the conditions of their own labour, despite not being seen as legitimate contributors to public debates. Roos highlights several examples of such activism. Prostitutes, working at times with activists like Hirschfeld, formed their own organisations. In 1921, for example, when the Hamburg *Bürgerschaft* (parliament) voted to close brothels, sex workers collaborated with other groups to challenge the crackdown, strategically using regulationist discourses to reject abolition, while simultaneously seeking to highlight the problems they faced under systems of regulation.⁷⁸ Later, with the passage of the RGBG in 1927, sex workers in various instances sought to resist the imposition of forced medical exams. Sex workers in Frankfurt, for instance, picketed the city's health office in protest, arguing that they should have the right to choose their own doctors.⁷⁹ Contrary to the rhetoric of passive victimhood underlying abolitionist notions of 'rescue', sex workers were active if subordinated agents in shaping the contexts of their labour.

Aside from the small number of sexologists, doctors, and other allies of sex workers, only the KPD consistently argued against the pathologising of sex workers and, in some cases, provided material support for workers themselves. In the case of the Frankfurt protests, KPD members daily came out in support, and in 1931 the Party gave legal support to a sex worker challenging compulsory medical exams.⁸⁰ These tended to be more localised interventions, however,

75 Abrams 1988, p. 197.

76 Lehnerdt 1926, p. 173.

77 Kern 1928.

78 Roos 2001, pp. 118–30.

79 Roos 2001, pp. 304–6.

80 Roos 2001, pp. 304–6.

often driven by women, with the dominant KPD position continuing to be that prostitution was an expression of capitalist degeneracy. Thus, an article in the communist-affiliated paper *Sichel und Hammer* argued that: '[p]rostitution is an appearance on the social body [*Gesellschaftskörper*] that reveals the entire fragility, hypocrisy, and immorality of the capitalist system – much more so than other social ills. Its dreadful consequences have always been recognised as a scourge without being abolished'.⁸¹ Or, as the KPD delegate Martha Arendsee put it in more restrained terms in Reichstag debates in early 1927, 'prostitution constitutes a vital element of the capitalist state, which will disappear only with the abolition of social classes. In different time periods, prostitution has varied according to the different historical forms of class rule, but it will vanish completely only in the classless state, in the communist state'.⁸²

KPD abolitionism was thus based in a structural analysis of capitalism, an approach that, while rarely explicitly acknowledging sex work as labour, allowed for a strong critique of the role of regulationist and abolitionist targeting of sex workers. Thus, the KPD considered contemporary forms of state intervention as repressive and as part of broader attempts to regulate working-class life and contain working-class radicalism; the Party therefore voted against the RGBG in 1927. Some KPD activists went further, following sex workers' own understanding of prostitution as a form of labour. For example, in Hamburg two KPD activists, Ketty Guttman and Ehrenfried Wagner, were instrumental in forming a union of registered prostitutes to agitate for better rates and working conditions. A newspaper, *Der Pranger* (*The Pillory*), was also published that gained a significant circulation in Hamburg and elsewhere. Sex workers complained, however, that the paper's strict class analysis of their labour, which clearly distinguished workers from bosses and thus condemned madams and brothel owners, ignored the complexity of their working relationships and risked being bad for business.⁸³

81 Sichel und Hammer 1924, p. 4.

82 Quoted in Roos 2001, p. 258. Gustav Landauer offered an interesting version of this argument, drawing on his spiritually-oriented anarchism. He acknowledged the role of poverty in prostitution, but read it as an expression of the alienating impact of the state. 'When pleasure becomes a commodity, there is no longer any difference between the souls of the uppermost and of the lowermost; and the house of prostitution is the house of representatives of our time. And the state exists to create order and the possibility to continue living amid all this spiritless nonsense, confusion, hardship and degeneracy. The state, with its schools, churches, courts, prisons, work-houses, the state with its army and its police; the state with its soldiers, officials and prostitutes' (1978, p. 42).

83 Roos 2001, pp. 107–18. Workers often made common cause with madams and owners in their struggle against interventions and the impacts of stigmatising practices.

This brief history of the politics of prostitution in the Weimar period highlights both its complexity and the extent to which it was deeply embedded in broader political contexts. Read in this light, Dix's production of grotesque prostitute bodies arguably fed into larger bourgeois projects for the regulation and containment of degenerate bodies, even while his fascination with sex work and workers avoided the puritanism of abolitionists. This fascination, however, was more about producing a 'transgressive' aesthetics and self-identity, an image of radicalism that was central to his artistic success. His victory in court, premised as it was on the educational quality of his work, showed the extent to which his transgressive aesthetics meshed rather easily with dominant rubrics of sexuality, gender, and degeneration. From the perspective of sex workers, there was arguably little that was transgressive or emancipatory about his work.

Dix was by no means the only artist who approached sex work in these ways, but in some cases this involved more complex readings of the figure of the prostitute. Thus, among the fragments of Richard Huelsenbeck's April 1918 writings in *Club Dada*, the first journal of Berlin Dada, he proclaims: 'women, women, women – as unchaste as possible, as false as possible, as instinctively whorish as possible – women and carnival (xylophone, banjo and kettle drum for the blasé) in their dance, in order to make sense of oneself'.⁸⁴ Huelsenbeck takes up the conventional association of woman and whore here, but revalues her, identifying her with Dada's subversive carnivalesque values. At the same time, however, she remains a mere instrument for the artist to 'make sense of oneself'. She is also reduced to a marker of the circulation of money. Huelsenbeck somewhat cryptically declaims: '[b]ut business is soul and when you buy a woman, you communicate'.⁸⁵

The simultaneous configuration of the prostitute as allegory for the modern condition, and as medium for self-fashioning, marked the work of many post-Expressionists in the Weimar period, but in this respect they differed little from their Expressionist precursors.⁸⁶ The painter Ludwig Kirchner, who produced many urban landscapes with prostitutes as their subject, wrote in a 1916 letter from the front: '[n]ow man is like the prostitutes I painted, washed aside and totally gone at any moment'.⁸⁷ It was this fear of dissolution that marked the crisis of the *Volkskörper*, expressed especially as a crisis of masculinity. While

84 Huelsenbeck, 'Foreword to the History of the Age', in Ades 2006, p. 72.

85 Huelsenbeck, 'Foreword to the History of the Age', in Ades 2006, p. 73.

86 See Schönfeld 1996 and 1997. Her work tends to be somewhat uncritical of the implications of the image of the prostitute in Expressionism, however.

87 Quoted in Lloyd 1991a, p. 147.

'man' in Kirchner's phrase may have been intended as the generic human, in fact it was clearly men here who were degenerating, becoming like prostitutes. This dimension of the crisis was especially evident in the frequently violent response to prostitution, both in reality and in representations. Thus, where sex workers and writers like Klages-Stange or Lehnerdt identified violence as the result of the marginalisation of sex workers, artists more commonly celebrated such violence as 'emancipatory'.

This undercurrent of violence exploded visually in the *Lustmord* ('sexual murder') genre of drawings and paintings that Dix, Grosz, Heinrich Maria Davringhausen, Rudolf Schlichter, and other Verist artists produced in significant quantities. These images depicted in often incredibly graphic fashion the murder and mutilation of women, primarily configured as prostitutes. These types of images, which have only relatively recently been discussed in a significant way in art history and cultural criticism,⁸⁸ were part of a broader fascination with sexualised and gendered violence. Thus, newspapers gave ample space to stories of sexual murder, while the famous 'street films' of the Weimar period likewise depicted prostitution (and gender relations more generally) as infused with potential violence. Such stories reinforced dominant conceptions of what Judith Walkowitz has called 'outcast' urban spaces and bodies, and it was a perspective that sold well.⁸⁹ Artistic and mass cultural representations intersected with medical and scientific studies here, both drawing on ideas of degeneration that often used sexual murder as a key example. Erich Wulffen's influential study *The Sexual Criminal*, for example, set out a detailed typology of sexual murder accompanied by a series of photos from police files. Further strengthening the connection between art and science, we find that Dix studied Wulffen's photos carefully in preparing his own documentary paintings.⁹⁰ In his own study of sexual murder, Hirschfeld even described a murderer he had interviewed who had bought *The Sexual Criminal*, fascinated by the images that it contained.⁹¹ Hirschfeld himself linked sexual murder with alcoholism and epilepsy, a combination of hereditary and acquired disorders that supposedly generated extreme violence.⁹²

88 Tatar 1995; Lewis 1997. Conventionally, when touched on at all, the *Lustmord* images have tended to be read solely at the metaphorical level.

89 Walkowitz 1992, pp. 28–33. The title of her book, 'city of dreadful delight', refers to London but captures the flavour of many of the conceptions of Berlin in the 1920s as well.

90 Wulffen 1910, pp. 454–88. On Dix's use of the images, see Lewis 1997, p. 224.

91 Hirschfeld 1926, p. 97.

92 Hirschfeld 1926, pp. 98–101.

Dix's fascination with sexualised violence was thus part of a dense network of social practices that sustained ideas of degeneration, and that reinforced a gendered social and representational order. In some respects his *Lustmord* works were very similar to his graphic depictions of mutilated soldiers; indeed, in *Two Victims* he appears to be paralleling the physical impact of militarised capitalism on both men and women. However, as my comments earlier suggested, the image itself differentiated between the two through the construction of an implied male viewer; *Two Victims* was much more specifically about a crisis of *male* subjectivity, with the violence experienced by soldiers depicted as an attack on and a fragmentation of the (male) subject. From this perspective, the woman in *Two Victims* appears as threat more than victim, linked to the witches of *Walpurgis Night*. The *Lustmord* images can be read as Dix's response to these threats, the violence enacted upon the bodies of prostitute-women constituting them as female *objects* upon which male violence is enacted and male subjectivity reconstituted. His images of both dead or wounded soldiers and murdered women involve bodily trauma, but in each case that trauma reflects the anxieties and experiences of the male subject.⁹³ As Maria Tatar argues, this violence responds to a feminine continuum whose trajectory is marked by 'the fantasmatic threat of a fertile Mother Earth at one extreme and the equally fantasmatic threat of a female body associated with disease, death, and decay at the other'.⁹⁴ It is thus unsurprising that in *Two Victims* the wounded soldier appears below and behind the prostitute, her diseased form looming threateningly. Tellingly, Dix's depictions of sexual violence sometimes included an autobiographical dimension, with Dix himself appearing as the sexual murderer.

For Carl Einstein, one of the more perceptive critics of what he called Dix's 'stinking panoramas',⁹⁵ the artist's repetition of these themes of urban violence and decay also marked the site of ambivalence in his work, with Einstein remaining unsure of its political import. He argued in a 1923 article that Dix's art underwent a transition to a Verism that had a critical potential. On Dix's early works, Einstein wrote:

93 One possible exception in this respect is *Soldier and Nun* from 1924, an etching of a soldier raping a nun that Dix and Nierendorf decided not to include in *The War* cycle. In this etching sexual violence is itself the subject, rather than a means to address the crisis of masculine subjectivity. The German occupation and militarised violence more generally is thus read as a form of male violence.

94 Tatar 1995, p. 97.

95 'Otto Dix', in Einstein 1996, 2, p. 342.

Shooting galleries and sex murders are the initial drumbeats in Dix's works. Very talented but rather beset by the miscellaneous. Romanticism of the local news; rather childish journalism.⁹⁶

On his work closer to 1923: 'Dix rightly understood that the accidental murderer is not especially dangerous; the gentlemen and ladies of correct, legitimate malice glide by tripping and breaking bones'.⁹⁷ Only a few years later, though, in his entry on Dix in his massive *Art of the Twentieth Century*, Einstein revised his view of Dix's politics. While he continued to characterise Dix as a Verist, he argued that '[p]erhaps at heart he is a reactionary painter of left-wing motifs'.⁹⁸ Certainly if we look at Dix's depictions of prostitutes, this reactionary core becomes clearly evident.

For Einstein, Dix's work contrasts negatively with that of George Grosz. Grosz draws on Constructivist themes, Einstein argues, but 'includes an element of Marxism with this industrial mechanization of painting'. The result, he goes on, is a reflection of the new social order of 'human types who are constituted as classes through wage labour, formal types that, precisely repeatable, are produced through the pre-calculated extraction of profit'.⁹⁹ Grosz and Dix are thus different to the extent that the former's work is structured through an understanding of the alienating impacts of capitalist social relations. Both work with 'types', but Grosz, who by the mid-1920s had become the most prominent KPD-affiliated artist, was attuned to their social and economic roots.

This analysis is only tenable, however, when gendered dynamics are elided. Like Dix, Grosz produced numerous *Lustmord* images, often with himself implicitly or explicitly inserted as the murderer.¹⁰⁰ More broadly, his dystopian urban landscapes may have savagely satirised bourgeois life, as Einstein argues, but they did so through gendered images of the grotesque body. The dominant masculine motif in this respect was the common left caricature of the overweight bourgeois male. Far more common were grotesque women, who consistently appear naked through their clothing, reduced to figures of sexuality whose transgression of public norms (nudity on the street) is reinscribed

96 'Otto Dix', in Einstein 1996, 2, p. 343. See Fleckner 2005, from whom I borrow the translation of this and the following passage (p. 72), for a discussion of Einstein's politics.

97 Ibid.

98 *Die Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts*, in Einstein 1996, 5, p. 232.

99 *Die Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts*, in Einstein 1996, 5, p. 227.

100 In a 1918 photo *Self-Portrait with Eva Peter in the Artist's Studio*, Grosz, for example, lurks as Jack the Ripper, clutching a knife with which he is threatening to assault Peter, his future wife; a 1916 painting depicts *John Heartfield, the Little Woman-Murderer*.

in an implied narrative of degeneration. As with Dix, these are not figures of emancipatory transgression, but markers of urban decay. Women in public space, indeed women in general, are sexualised in Grosz's work, constructed implicitly or explicitly as prostitutes. They are not figured through markers of class, as is the case with the grotesque male bourgeois or downtrodden workers. Prostitutes are not 'types' produced by social relations of labour and exploitation, nor do they enable a critique of capitalist social relations; rather, they mirror the typologies of reactionary sexology, criminology, and medicine. Dix's or Grosz's sex-murderers may have been conceived of as 'transgressive' or 'outlaw' figures rejecting bourgeois propriety, but they ultimately violently reinscribed dominant gendered norms.¹⁰¹

In a sense, the *Lustmord* images represent a return to the Weiningerian conception of gender and sexuality that we saw in the second chapter. As Barbara Wright argues, Expressionists had drawn on this tradition, but pulled back from its full implications: 'Weininger wishes to overcome sexual difference by eradicating sexuality, but this position is too extreme for the Expressionists, who propose instead a kind of quarantine of the sexual within women, who will live exclusively in and through their sexuality so that men may be freed from it – but visit occasionally'.¹⁰² Post-Expressionist male artists like Dix and Grosz saw women's sexuality in far more threatening terms, producing a violent response that, while not exterminationist in the sense that we saw with Weininger, represented a dramatic escalation.

The Dadaist Raoul Hausmann offered an interesting critical perspective on these developments. His critiques of bourgeois sexual and gender relations challenged the Weiningerian naturalisation of women as either mother or prostitute, stressing that the desire to maintain this dichotomy was central to constructions of masculinity. 'These conclusions Weininger made are

101 Dennis Crockett argues that in Dix's case, his obsessive reiteration of an 'outlaw' and violent persona signalled a profound and genuine difficulty in coping with his return to civilian life after the violence of war (1999, pp. 72–73). It is important to keep in mind the genuinely traumatic experiences of war, a point to which I will return in the next section, but this psychologising approach also runs the risk of minimising the extent to which these responses were part of broader cultural patterns; it is notable in this respect that Crockett says little of the gendered dynamics at play in Dix's work. Another key point is the role that the 'outlaw' persona played in marketing the work of the avant-garde. It is arguably because their 'transgression' remained politically unfocused that the work of the avant-garde could remain sought-after by bourgeois buyers; even the conservative industrial magnate Hugo Stinnes, for example, apparently took an interest in Grosz's work (see Herzfelde 1996, p. 53).

102 Wright 2005, p. 298.

absolutely applicable for – woman in bourgeois society . . . Just as the woman in bourgeois society is pulled to and fro between an orientation to motherhood and to prostitution, so do men in this society fluctuate between idealism and criminality, between the spiritual and the animal'.¹⁰³ While Hausmann is not discussing *Lustmord* images here, we can read the work of Dix and others, with its desire for spiritual transcendence and violent animality, as a product of these gendered contradictions of bourgeois society. What they lacked was Hausmann's critical analysis of this dichotomy.

The most sustained critical perspectives on sex work and gender relations, however, came from women artists. Violence against prostitutes was rarely if ever eroticised or celebrated in their work, in part because these artists, like many feminist activists, identified much more concretely with the subject position of the sex worker. In some cases this meant a continued identification of sex work with violence, but there was also a much stronger tendency even in these cases to depict the prostitute as subject rather than simply a body on which violence is enacted. Trude Bernhard's 'Lament of a Whore', for example, has the prostitute speaking of violence: '[h]as anyone ever stroked my brow without hurting me? . . . My kisses fall bleeding, cut down by the scythe of parting'.¹⁰⁴ This is a different perspective on sex work in that it is written from the perspective of the worker, even while it continues to read sex work solely in terms of violence. For many, though, violence or degeneration were not the only horizons within which to understand sex work. Irmgard Keun, for instance, developed a complex and nuanced portrait of the nexus of sex and money in her 1932 novel *The Artificial Silk Girl*. There she highlights the extent to which various forms of economic and social exchange were mediated through sex. Set in the context of the depression of the later Weimar years, the novel tells the story of a single 'new woman' in Berlin struggling to negotiate relationships and finances; the boundaries bourgeois morality sets around 'prostitution' or 'love' have little purchase in these contexts. Instead, everyday social relations are lubricated by exchanges of various kinds; the exchange of sex for money is part of a continuum of activities and forms of labour that are not fixed in individual or social bodies as theories of degeneration so often claimed.¹⁰⁵

Many visual artists produced work that challenged the misogynist violence that dominated avant-garde conceptions of the prostitute. Gerta Overbeck, Elfriede Lohse-Wächtler, and Elsa Haensgen-Dingkuhn all depicted brothels

103 Hausmann 1919e, p. 464.

104 Quoted in Wright 2005, p. 307.

105 Keun 2002.

and prostitution as everyday spaces and practices. Lohse-Wächtler, who was friends with Dix, presented sex workers very differently than he did, not as overdetermined types, but as individualised people.¹⁰⁶ Haensgen-Dingkuhn's scenes of the St. Pauli district in Hamburg, perhaps the most notorious location in Germany for 'depraved' urban life, likewise eschewed common markers of urban degeneration, depicting street scenes as sites of everyday interaction. As Marsha Meskimmon argues, a particularly notable work is Overbeck's *Prostitute* from 1923. This painting is entirely different from those of Dix. Here we see a sex worker in the everyday activity of shopping, in this case purchasing a contraceptive douche, one of the key tools of the trade. The body of the prostitute bears none of the common markers of disease or violence, nor is she depicted through sexualised imagery.¹⁰⁷

Overbeck's 'viewpoint is unusual; by far the most typical representational strategy from the period sees the figure of the prostitute as a dangerous yet desirable commodity on display to the male artist/viewer/client'.¹⁰⁸ Here the commodity is not the prostitute herself, but the contraception she is purchasing. Presenting her in the act of shopping presents possibilities of viewer identification absent in Dix's images. Where his implied viewer is resolutely male, here it is women who perform much of the shopping. That Overbeck depicts the purchase of contraception adds an extra layer of political meaning given the complex gendered and classed debates over contraception and abortion in the period. The sale of contraception in Germany was only decriminalised in 1927 under the RGBG, so Overbeck's work needs to be read as part of the broader struggle over women's reproductive practices that ran through the period, culminating, as I will discuss in the final chapter, with the struggle for access to abortion in the later Weimar years. Overbeck thus integrates sex work with a broader set of struggles around reproduction and the regulation of women's bodies. Rather than the shocking violence of Dix's canvases, Overbeck presents an aesthetics of the everyday as a site of negotiation and resistance.

4.4 The Prosthetic Man: The Wounded or Disabled Veteran

In a satirical article in *Die Aktion* in 1920 looking at what he called the 'prosthetic economy [*Prothesenwirtschaft*]', Raoul Hausmann mimicked the celebratory rhetoric heard more and more often extolling the great potential of prosthetic

¹⁰⁶ Quermann 2006, pp. 70–71.

¹⁰⁷ Meskimmon 1999, pp. 23–28.

¹⁰⁸ Meskimmon 1999, p. 24.

technologies for the regeneration of the country. 'The prosthetic-person [*Prothetiker*] is therefore a better human being, raised thanks to the world war to, so to speak, a higher class'.¹⁰⁹ One such technology, the Brandenburg artificial arm, is 'the greatest wonder of technology and a great mercy', impervious to scalding heat or even to being shot, and able to work a 25-hour day without becoming tired. Prostheses ensure higher taxes for the Fatherland, and prosthetic men require less food: 'thank goodness there are still upstanding lads – and we can remember this for the new big war – when in principle we will have just two types of soldiers: those who will be shot dead right away, and the second type, those who are presented with prostheses. With these people we will manage Germany's rebuilding – that's why every reasonable person demands a prosthetic economy instead of a council dictatorship'.¹¹⁰

Writing as the hopes for a council republic were fading, Hausmann ironically presents the prosthetic state as the capitalist response to communist social transformation. Hausmann's satire is telling precisely because the language he uses and the themes he takes up were not uncommon at the time. Medical and popular discourses of prosthetics put forward techno-utopian visions of bodily regeneration and transformation. More concretely, Hausmann's satire shows the extent to which ideas of rehabilitation were read through an economic lens; the value of prostheses could only be measured in terms of labour, extensions of Taylorist and Fordist strategies of efficiency integrating workers with the machine. Hausmann's own art developed this satirical perspective through the production of cyborg bodies whose various mechanical components extend the body's potentials in mysterious ways.¹¹¹

Hausmann was deeply attuned to the ways in which capitalist practices reengineered bodies and subjectivities. As his references to war suggest, however, he had a more concrete phenomenon in mind, namely the huge number of war veterans who had been wounded or disabled. Even as many of them were being shunted to the streets or confined in institutions, programmes were being implemented to integrate them back into the workforce and, crucially, to lessen state obligations towards them. Unlike the decontextualised presentation of bodily injury we saw in Dix's *Two Victims* or his many canvases showing disabled veterans begging on the streets, Hausmann's satire is carefully

109 Hausmann 1920, p. 669.

110 Hausmann 1920, p. 670.

111 The best-known of these works is a wooden head on which a series of measuring devices and other mechanical prostheses are affixed. The prostheses in this case fulfil no obvious function, symbolising instead the underlying irrationality of the mechanistic rationalisation of the human. Tellingly, the work is entitled *The Spirit of the Age*.

attuned to the concrete politics at play, suggesting that the politics of disability can only be understood in relation to a broader project for the production of labouring and fighting bodies.

More broadly, however, in the culture of the period the figure of the 'war cripple' or 'war wounded'¹¹² joined that of the prostitute as one of the most complex and overdetermined symbols of the Weimar period, the two together providing a gendered pair embedded deeply in practices of social hygiene and eugenics.¹¹³ At one level, the constant recurrence of images of wounded and disabled veterans simply reflected the massive bodily impact of the War. While exact numbers are difficult to come by, Robert Whalen estimates that 4.3 million German soldiers were wounded during the War. In 1920 the government officially recognised over 1.5 million as officially disabled, making them eligible for a pension. That number was reduced later in 1920 by giving those with a disability defined as ten percent or less a lump-sum payment, and again in 1923 for those with less than a 25 percent disability.¹¹⁴ The percentages reflect the state's attempts to manage social welfare programmes by categorising disability; the numbers were tied directly to work, with the percentage reflecting the presumed reduction in ability to labour. Both in terms of state expenditures and labour, the question of disability thus loomed large in Weimar economic and political thinking, with the state trying to manage these issues through the twinned projects of welfare and prosthetics. Disabled veterans and their dependents, along with other disabled people, often challenged these state practices, however, meaning that the politics of disability remained a major field of contestation throughout the Weimar period. It was in this context that artistic representations of war-related injuries and disabilities emerged, a perspective that, in many cases, was shaped by artists' own experiences in the War.

Disabled veterans occupied a distinct and conflicted position in relation to broader discourses of disability. Not only were almost all of them men, as

112 The term 'war cripple' (*Kriegskrüppel*) was commonly used, including by some of the artists I will discuss here. As we shall see the term was sometimes rejected for its stigmatising implications. Other common terms included 'war invalid' (*Kriegsinvalider*) or 'war wounded' (*Kriegsbeschädigter* or *Kriegsversehrter*). Here I will vary my use of the English equivalents to fit the context (although, as with the term 'sex worker', I will use more contemporary terminology in my discussion as well). One of the underlying themes in this section will be to highlight the implications of different ways of conceptualising serious injury, impairment, and disability.

113 Kienitz 2008 offers the most comprehensive study of these intersecting symbolic, bodily, and social relations.

114 Whalen 1984, pp. 16, 40; Hong 1998, p. 94.

soldiers they had, according to the rhetoric of war, performed a peculiarly masculine bodily sacrifice. As politicians frequently proclaimed, they were owed the 'thanks of the Fatherland'.¹¹⁵ At the same time, though, social hygienic discourses had long read people with disabilities through narratives of degeneration and the health of the *Volkskörper*. Thus, disabled veterans were caught up in two potentially contradictory modes of understanding, what we might call the heroic and the social hygienic narratives. These competing discourses had directly material implications, particularly in contestations over pensions or other benefits. Disabled veterans drew on the heroic narrative not only for their own identity formation, but also to argue for state support.¹¹⁶ Indeed, soldiers had access to state support that was denied other disabled people, as there was a network of state and district welfare bureaus (*Fürsorgestellen*) dealing with disabled veterans and war survivors that was separate from other welfare and disability programmes.¹¹⁷ As Dix's configuration of the wounded veteran in *Two Victims* suggests, however, and as I will argue here, wounded and disabled veterans were never entirely able to escape from the pull of narratives of social hygiene, demonstrating in the process the centrality of a politics of disability to the embodied logic of capitalist modernity more generally, and Weimar society in particular.

Throughout the Weimar period support for disabled veterans and their dependents made up a significant proportion of state spending. While the number of disabled veterans receiving pensions had declined to 720,000 by 1924, that year also saw 365,000 widows, 962,000 half orphans, 65,000 full orphans, and 194,000 dependent parents receiving public support through the military pension system, with the broader war-related pension and welfare programmes taking up fully one-third of government funds between 1920 and 1932.¹¹⁸ Other social groups – such as *Sozialrentner*, who lived on funds from disability, old-age, or accident insurance, and the *Kleinrentner*, who had seen their income from savings and investments wiped out by inflation – likewise staked a claim to state support as victims of war.¹¹⁹ These social programmes were deeply shaped by the broader social welfare system in Germany on which,

¹¹⁵ Whalen 1984, p. 119.

¹¹⁶ Beil 1998 uses the journals of the organisations of disabled veterans to attempt to trace out the impacts of these competing narratives for their experience of life after war.

¹¹⁷ Hong 1998, pp. 92–97.

¹¹⁸ Hong 1998, p. 94; Whalen 1984, pp. 16, 38–43.

¹¹⁹ Eghigian 1993, pp. 382–83, 400–1. The *Sozialrentner* in particular began to use the terminology of victimhood to cement their claims alongside those of other 'war victims' (*Kriegsopfer*). See also Hong 1998, pp. 97–109.

as I have noted, the SPD in particular sought to ground its place in Weimar politics.

Social welfare had a long history in Germany, implemented originally by Bismarck as part of his attempts to undercut the growing influence of the left.¹²⁰ As Andreas Killen puts it: 'Germany's social legislation was conceived as the cornerstone of a policy aimed at taming the revolutionary impulses of the working classes, which it sought to redirect into what [Thomas] Mann called a revolution of the body'.¹²¹ This revolution of the body was the point at which social welfare and social hygiene intersected. Prior to the First World War, welfare had been run primarily by confessional organisations, with poverty configured through a paternalistic model that differentiated deserving from undeserving poor. The pre-War SPD resisted these stigmatising social welfare perspectives and argued for universal state programmes. The war years saw welfare programmes move somewhat in this direction. As we saw in the second chapter, existing social programmes expanded and changed as the state and military attempted to sustain the war effort. Young-Sun Hong argues that: 'World War I precipitated a contradiction in the conditions of social reproduction in Germany because the social programs undertaken to mobilize the home front and the increasingly industrialized war effort tended to undermine those relations of political authority and social deference which the war was being fought to preserve'.¹²² It was in this sense that, as we saw, the state was increasingly delegitimised during the War.

During the War, war-related disability had already been presented as a distinct social welfare issue. In early 1915 the prominent orthopaedic surgeon Konrad Biesalski argued in the Reichstag that state resources should be redirected to support disabled veterans on the grounds that, 'firm like the phalanx of our fighters on all the borders, inside the country stands this social dam'.¹²³ Biesalski's comments reflect the militarised logic of total war that we saw in the second chapter, with the defence of both internal and external boundaries crucial to its prosecution. This logic translated into the language of treatment as well, with work the measure of success. Like the deserving poor who could be helped up by welfare, 'it was the *will to work* that would propel the disabled veteran back into the self-esteem of social productivity'.¹²⁴ Medical treatment itself was frequently configured as a battle of wills between doctor

120 On the history of the welfare state in Germany, see Hong 1998; Crew 1998a.

121 Killen 2006, p. 10.

122 Hong 1998, pp. 30–31.

123 Biesalski 1915, p. 23.

124 Fineman 1999, p. 90 (my emphasis).

and patient.¹²⁵ Some veterans' organisations strategically took up this view as well, arguing that the 'will to work' of disabled soldiers was *more* powerful than in the population at large.¹²⁶ Underlying all of these claims was the implication that some disabled people displayed an inadequate will; as with the 'work-shy' unemployed, this was the point at which discourses of degeneration took hold.

In the aftermath of the War, under the influence of the SPD, the logic of welfare shifted to an extent. The SPD's desired universal, secular social welfare system was never realised, with the Weimar system remaining a hybrid of confessional and state-run programmes, and the punitive and stigmatising model of poverty also retaining much of its strength.¹²⁷ But the SPD did work to reform and expand the social welfare system, seeking to shift away from the paternalistic Bismarckian model even while still conceiving of social welfare in terms of the containment of the radical left. In relation to disability, the most tangible result of these reforms was the passage of the Law of the Severely Disabled (*Schwerbeschädigtengesetz*) in 1920, which was sponsored by the SPD but garnered cross-party support. The law was notable in that it covered not only disabled veterans, but also other disabled people (in particular those disabled in accidents).¹²⁸ It mandated that employers of over 25 people hire at least one disabled person, the numbers increasing with the size of the enterprise. The impact of the law was significant, ensuring relatively high employment rates for disabled people.¹²⁹ It was a remarkable piece of legislation in this respect, but it also demonstrates the centrality of labour to social welfare initiatives and the politics of disability.

The law intersected with the desire to reassert a gendered division of labour that, as we saw in previous chapters, was a primary concern across the political spectrum in the aftermath of the War. Those covered by the Law of the Severely Disabled were primarily men, and it was implemented at precisely the time that women's labour force participation was being discouraged by demobilisation policies. The law was thus geared not only towards rehabilitation in terms of disability, but also the reconstitution of masculinity. For the USPD –

125 Lerner 1998, pp. 87–88.

126 Beil 1998, p. 152.

127 Crew 1998a, pp. 197–200.

128 Veterans with a disability categorised as 40 percent and over qualified for state support, but non-veterans only at 50 percent. The categorisation of disability in this way gave doctors and bureaucrats broad discretion in determining qualification; this became evident in the late 1920s and early 1930s when doctors began to loosen their criteria, leading to a large jump in the number of those covered by the law (see Jackson 1993, pp. 444–45).

129 Jackson 1993.

who argued for increased pensions rather than the imposition of workforce quotas in the initial debates over the law in 1918 – it was precisely the gendered order that was at stake. Thus, the USPD's Karl Ryssel suggested that inadequate pensions would force the wives of disabled men to work, undermining families and undercutting men's wages.¹³⁰ In this context, not only were women more likely than men to lose their jobs to disabled veterans, but disabled *women* were almost entirely absent from the debate.

The extensive rehabilitation industry that sprang up early in the War likewise took the male working body as its object. The development of this industry cemented the professional claim of the medical establishment, supplemented in the case of prosthetics by engineers, to treatment of the disabled body.¹³¹ As Mia Fineman puts it, in the aftermath of defeat, the 'rehabilitation industry briskly stepped in ... to replace the amputated will to victory with a prosthetic will to work'.¹³² It is this tendency that was satirised so effectively by Hausmann. Prosthetic technologies were developed as part of a reconceptualisation of the body that drew heavily on Taylorist principles of rationalised production, as well as the specifically European field of psychotechnics. For many in the industry, the development of prosthetic technologies was celebrated as a new frontier for German technological achievement, an integration of medicine and engineering that, as Fineman suggests, could redeem the failure of the War.¹³³ The focus of production shifted from aesthetic prostheses (that is, prostheses designed to mimic the appearance of the limbs they replaced) to functional prostheses designed to perform specific tasks; the former were still produced, but were intended for leisure time or for workers who did not require use of those limbs at work.¹³⁴ The capitalist division of work and leisure was thus reflected in prosthetic design itself.

As Peter Sloterdijk argues, this *homo prostheticus* had affinities to the armoured soldier-male of the radical right's imagination, both in terms of the emphasis on technology and the premium placed on will.¹³⁵ However, his argument tends to ignore the extent to which disability was also enmeshed in the more mundane bourgeois and managerial practices of labour, social hygiene,

130 Jackson 1993, pp. 424–25.

131 Kienitz 2008, pp. 152–70.

132 Fineman 1999, p. 91.

133 See also Kienitz 2008, pp. 153–56.

134 Neuman 2010, pp. 97–104. Note the similarity not only to Taylorist principles, but also to broader trends in modernist architecture and design in which function was proclaimed as the guiding principle.

135 Sloterdijk 1987, pp. 443–59.

and social welfare. Or, to put it another way, radical right ideologies were not discontinuous with those practices. Sloterdijk's approach entails a rejection of the instrumental rationality on which rehabilitation was based, but we need to be careful in drawing out the implications of this critique. As Carol Poore argues, while rehabilitation and welfare provisions reflected a technocratic and potentially repressive approach, in many ways they also proved enabling for disabled people.¹³⁶ Germany provided more extensive pensions and care for disabled veterans than other countries,¹³⁷ and rehabilitation, she argues, enjoyed significant success. In a social context in which labour was ideologically and materially central to everyday life, such provisions were crucial in sustaining quality of life, a point that disability rights activists themselves stressed. Some, including the prominent activist Otto Perl, argued for the importance of orthopaedics and medicine in improving conditions for people with physical disabilities, although he was sceptical of the impact of the 1920 legislative changes, and argued that the high point in this respect had been reached before the War.¹³⁸

An interesting expression of the narrative of progress surrounding prostheses was the way in which they were covered in the media. They were often fetishised as markers of technological progress, celebrated through articles and photographs in popular science magazines like *Die Umschau*. As with Taylorist time-motion studies more generally, photography and film were deployed in the service of rehabilitation, enabling the representation and analysis of movement in the service of this progress. The doctor Waldemar Schweisheimer tied this directly to strengthening the will of disabled veterans: '[n]othing encourages the war wounded [*Kriegsbeschädigten*] more quickly and strongly, nothing gives them more hope and therefore makes them more driven and skillful, as when they can see their hard-working exercises presented to them, either in person or, when that isn't possible, in the excellent substitute of film'.¹³⁹

136 Poore 2007, pp. 8–18. Her account tends to draw a rather stark dichotomy between the 'positive' and 'negative' implications of rehabilitation that overlooks the deeply and internally contradictory nature of many practices around disability; positive and negative are not so easily disentangled. She rightly critiques, though, the too-easy rejection of rehabilitation as irrevocably tainted by its implications in Taylorist instrumental rationality.

137 Eghigian 1993, pp. 375–403 argues that pensions were expanding more broadly as part of changing expectations of the state – changes we saw in the second chapter in relation to the War. As during the War, however, these expectations continued to be only partially fulfilled.

138 Perl 1926, pp. 36–38. See also Kügelgen 1919.

139 Schweisheimer 1920, p. 34.

Schweisheimer's confident claim notwithstanding, it is clear that not all disabled veterans shared this positive view of rehabilitation, with many rejecting the reductionism of its individualising and rationalising approach. In response, many turned to collective action. As mentioned in the second chapter, wounded and disabled veterans played a prominent role in the wartime protests. Their demonstrations escalated after the War. A host of organisations speaking for disabled veterans and other 'war victims' sprang up, divided primarily along political lines. There were seven such major organisations with a total membership of nearly 1.4 million in 1921. The SPD-oriented *Reichsbund*, founded in 1917, was the largest, while the KPD-oriented International Organisation of Victims of War and Labour, which formed out of a split from the *Reichsbund*, encompassed over 130,000 members by 1921. Crucially, as the name suggests, the communist organisation broadened the scope of those covered to include work-related disability.¹⁴⁰ The Weimar political landscape was profoundly shaped by the agitation of these different groups.

The formation of these groups helped to ensure that disability became a prominent public issue in the aftermath of the War, and also led to an increase in the participation of disabled people who were not veterans. At the same time, the new organisations drew on the work of disabled activists who had long been agitating for social change. Organisations of blind and deaf Germans had formed before the War, and after the War they sought alliances with veterans. In the case of blindness, this mobilisation won the expansion of social welfare coverage beyond those blinded in the War.¹⁴¹ The *Selbsthilfebund der Körperbehinderten* (Self-Help League of the Physically Disabled [SBK]), also named the *Otto Perl-Bund* after its founder, formed after the War to support all physically disabled people. Perl's own history of disability, published in 1926, was notable for its critical analysis of changing institutional practices around disability, rejecting especially the persistent reading of disability in relation to labour. He argued that Luther's contention that '[w]hoever doesn't work also shouldn't eat', had profoundly shaped the modern conception of disability, inscribing it in discourses of 'worthiness' that were profoundly troubling.¹⁴²

Many male disability-rights activists hoped to undermine the depiction of disabled people as unwilling or incapable of work by mobilising military and masculinist discourses of heroism. Disabled veterans, the *Reichsbund* newspaper stressed, were not just heroes of the War, but 'heroes of everyday life' for

140 Whalen 1984, pp. 117–29.

141 Poore 2007, pp. 56–57.

142 Perl 1926, p. 25.

the way in which they had to fight through poverty, suffering, and the impact of their disabilities.¹⁴³ Disabled non-veterans drew on these themes as well. Carl von Kugelgen, who had lost an arm in civilian life, rejected the stigmatising term 'cripple' [*Krüppel*], especially for its association with begging, and the conception of people with disabilities as being of lesser worth.¹⁴⁴ 'Having once lost my arm', he argued, 'I would not – out of my conscious, free will – have it any other way, for what appeared to be a loss which would make me weaker has actually made me richer and stronger, has made me into what I am. I want my destiny, I love my destiny, I am my destiny'.¹⁴⁵ The title of his book, written during the War, rendered this revaluation of disability experience through a military metaphor of male overcoming: *Not Cripple – Victor!*

The SBK thus argued for the deinstitutionalisation of disability and the provision of support for work and independent living. This point was made in Marie Gruhl's presentation on behalf of the SBK at the 38th conference on welfare in March 1924. Arguing that self-help groups were the third pillar of social welfare alongside state and private agencies, Gruhl argued that the place of disabled people was 'not in the infirmary, they belong in free living and work communities'.¹⁴⁶ Significantly, though, Gruhl (like the SBK more generally) focused on physical disability; she stressed that she 'is not speaking of the mentally ill'.¹⁴⁷ Mobilising this distinction between forms of disability was part of the SBK's strategic positioning by which it sought to expand access to programmes and benefits for physical disabilities to all disabled people, not only veterans.¹⁴⁸ By hierarchising forms of disability, however, this approach ran the risk of reinforcing some dimensions of discourses of degeneration and social hygiene.

As I will argue in the next section on ideas of madness, discourses of degeneration were founded on a close connection between bodies and psyches, rendering the distinctions Gruhl and the SBK sought to maintain extremely unstable. Interestingly, artists and writers tended to reverse the stigmatising of types of disability, with physical disability often presented through the lens of the grotesque, and cognitive difference (madness) valorised as potentially emancipatory and creative. In such artistic productions, the prosthetic body

143 Quoted in Beil 1998, p. 143.

144 Kugelgen 1919, especially pp. 61–62.

145 Kugelgen 1919, p. 68.

146 Gruhl 1924, p. 4.

147 Gruhl 1924, p. 3.

148 For the SBK's arguments in this respect, see Malikowski 1924; Nachrichtendienst 1924.

itself tended to serve as an ambivalent symbol for the fragmented state of modern life. In this sense, the cultural politics of disability was closely linked with ideas of fragmentation and totality outlined in the last chapter. As with the prostitute body, representations of disabled bodies tended to abstract them from the lived experiences and material concerns outlined above, reading them instead through fetishised or stigmatised tropes of bodily difference. Notable as well is the fact that, despite the prominence of the various social movements that I have touched on here, most artists tended to efface the social constitution of disability.

One of the most famous works using disability as a symbol for modern life was Leonard Frank's book *Der Mensch ist Gut* (*Man is Good*), written during the later years of the War. Frank's own career followed the familiar trajectory from Expressionism to *neue Sachlichkeit*. He was associated with the Activist movement around Kurt Hiller whose work was rejected by many left critics and artists for its espousal of vague humanist and artist-led notions of transformation. For his defenders, Frank's work 'had the effect of the unyielding sobriety (*Nüchternheit*) of photography' associated with reportage.¹⁴⁹ *Man is Good* was made up of a series of loosely connected stories written in an Expressionist vein, with the culminating part of the book focusing on 'the war cripple'. This latter story begins in an operating theatre behind the front, amputated body parts strewn about, with both the doctor and patients trying desperately to sustain a sense of coherence in the midst of this bloody fragmentation. Through this bodily violence they find a shared humanity that transcends the antagonisms of war, a theme familiar from Toller's *Transformation*. The mad, the blind, the cripples of all sides in the War are now linked, thinks one soldier: '[t]hey wounded us, we wounded them. And fundamentally we are all comrades'.¹⁵⁰

The scene shifts to a troop train full of wounded soldiers returning to the home front. Frank details the injuries, including a car full of 'mad' veterans, a man with severe facial injuries, and a man who has lost all of his limbs. Upon arrival in a city the men disembark and, in a typically Expressionist conclusion, lead a parade through the town, the man with no limbs seated on a kind of throne leading the way in this vaguely carnivaleque procession. The parade thus serves as an integrative and redemptive spectacle. Only Jesus had a bigger impact than the wounded veterans, the narrator says. Their presence overwhelms the residents, who all gradually emerge out of their homes and

149 Ossip Kalenter, 'Tisch mit Büchern', in Sabina Becker 2000, p. 61.

150 Frank 1918, p. 183.

workplaces, shutting the city down. This event gives rise to a new human, and a new humanity.¹⁵¹

Frank's account participates in a number of very ambivalent conceptions of disability. The Expressionist evocation of a social transformation mediated by the intervention of these wounded and disabled veterans is powerful in that it foregrounds the immense bodily impact of war and configures the wounded and disabled body as a source of social regeneration. In one sense the novel's excessively visible rendering of the bodies of disabled veterans can be read as an implicit critique of the institutional practice of keeping veterans with severe facial or other highly visible injuries confined in secretive military hospitals away from the public view.¹⁵² However, as Elizabeth Hamilton argues: '[d]epicting disability as a product of damage, Frank upholds the notion that disability is derived from able bodiedness and is not to be considered an experience in its own right. When able bodiedness is validated in this manner, it is impossible to speak of disability as anything but a problem or a flaw whose solution lies in its prevention or cure.'¹⁵³ In this sense Frank's work deploys disability as what David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder have called a 'narrative prosthesis'. They argue that disability is anything but hidden in literature: 'disabled peoples' social invisibility has occurred in the wake of their perpetual circulation throughout print history'.¹⁵⁴ In this context, 'disability has been used throughout history as a crutch upon which literary narratives lean for their representational power, disruptive potentiality, and analytical insight. Bodies show up in stories as dynamic entities that resist or refuse the cultural scripts assigned to them'.¹⁵⁵

The trope of disability is thus paradoxical, undermining but ultimately guaranteeing normative forms of bodily and narrative coherence. The problem, evident to a significant degree in Frank's story and much of the cultural production of the period, is that disabled bodies tend to appear not in relation to historical and material contexts of disability experience, but as figures enabling other narrative ends, in this case a quasi-Expressionist transformation. As with prostitute bodies, disabled bodies here work very much as a crutch supporting artistic renderings of transgression and transformation. For critics like Heinz Kindermann, writing in 1933, this represented an inadmissible

151 Frank 1918, pp. 200–7.

152 Ulrich 1993, pp. 115–17; Kienitz 1999.

153 Hamilton 1997, p. 226. Note the difference here with Kügelgen's emphatic claiming of his bodily and subject position.

154 Mitchell and Snyder 2000, p. 52.

155 Mitchell and Snyder 2000, p. 49.

utopianism for which the 'radical sobriety [*Radikalen Sachlichkeit*]' of writers like Brecht offered a necessary antidote.¹⁵⁶

The constant return in this period to representations of non-normative bodies foregrounded the very difficult problem of the grotesque which, as I have argued, was central to avant-garde aesthetics. This problem of the grotesque was itself part of the experience of disability and impairment. As Robert Whalen argues in his history of the bodily impact of the First World War in Germany, veterans' experiences *were* shaped by the grotesque. 'Touched by grotesque death, they discovered to their horror that they had become grotesque'.¹⁵⁷ This was most notably the case for veterans with severe facial injuries who, as indicated earlier, were generally segregated from other patients and the public.¹⁵⁸ By appropriating this experience as a narrative prosthesis, though, Frank largely loses a sense of this materiality of the grotesque. Rather, as with so many of the prostitute bodies we saw previously, the grotesque body becomes merely a vehicle for the production of a utopian, and often masculine, wholeness.

Ernst Friedrich's pacifist polemic *War Against War!* is a sharp political work that highlights the problem of representation evident here. *War Against War!*, a photo-book produced as part of the anti-war events of 1924, confronts the reader with page after page of photographs of the bodily impact of war, with facial trauma especially prominent. 'At last', he has an imagined reader say, 'at last the mask has been torn away from this "field of honour," from this lie of an "heroic death," and from all the other beautiful phrases, from all this international swindle the mask has at last, yea, at last, been torn away!!'¹⁵⁹ The 'true' face of war is revealed.

Even today, *War Against War!* remains a powerful and challenging indictment of war, its visceral impact driven by the images of destroyed bodies. Aesthetically, Friedrich's deployment of the grotesque body was rooted firmly in a critical documentary practice similar to that of Dix, but deployed now

156 Heinz Kindermann, 'Idealismus und Sachlichkeit in der deutschen Gegenwartsdichtung', in Sabina Becker 2000, p. 433.

157 Whalen 1984, p. 47.

158 A rather horrifying instance of the instrumentalisation of wounded veterans came at the Versailles conference after the War. When the German delegation came to the Hall of Mirrors at the palace to sign the final document they were met by five French veterans, all with severe facial injuries, who had been brought from their isolated hospitals for the occasion. Clemenceau tearfully shook each of their hands, a piece of political theatre in which the disabled veterans were reduced to props in a spectacle designed to further humiliate the Germans (see Audoin-Rozeau 2001, pp. 280–87).

159 Friedrich 1987, p. 22.

for an explicitly pacifist project. In the book, he says, 'a picture of War, objectively true and faithful to nature, has been photographically recorded for all time'.¹⁶⁰ Notably, many of the photographs came from the growing medical and rehabilitation literature. Friedrich radically repurposed these images, wrenching them out of their medical context and using them to challenge the interlinked discourses of militarism and pathology. It was especially his use of these images that sparked massive protest from the right, who denounced his book as a sacrilege against veterans, the military, and the nation. Unlike Dix's appropriations of these images, Friedrich's work was arguably more complex in the sense that, in his documentary insistence on the materiality of those bodies, he went beyond a merely instrumental aestheticisation, challenging instead the production of the grotesque body in war itself.

In all of the examples I have touched on here it is clear that the grotesque body, as Mary Russo argues, cannot be understood outside of its gendered implications.¹⁶¹ The degree to which such bodies served as a vehicle for the expression of a crisis of *masculine* identity was especially evident in Dix's work. As I have argued, his *Two Victims* suggests an asymmetrical relationship between the figures of the prostitute and the war wounded that revolves around anxieties over a damaged masculinity. Friedrich makes a similar connection in depicting a group of sex workers in front of a brothel behind the front, although in *War Against War!* we don't find the same antagonistic relationship set up with soldiers.¹⁶² Dix, however, returned obsessively to the theme of the grotesque as a crisis of masculinity. One of his most famous works, *Prague Street* (1920, Ill. 12), depicts a disabled veteran begging on Dresden's elegant main commercial street. His three prosthetic limbs and his distorted posture link discourses of disability directly with avant-garde concerns with the fragmented modern body. In one sense the work offers a simple message, presenting 'the viewer with a contrast between the plight of the war cripple and the callousness of the public'.¹⁶³ This humanist pity is by no means the dominant frame, however.

160 Friedrich 1987, p. 21.

161 Russo 1995.

162 The photograph shows the women topless, with their clients, German soldiers, standing behind them. Friedrich's caption reads: 'German "heroes" in Belgian brothels. ("And German culture shall someday regenerate the world.")' (Friedrich 1987, p. 180). Here Friedrich picks up on a number of themes we saw in the second chapter, responding ironically to the belief of the power of German culture, and stressing the extent to which it was bound up with ideas of de- and re-generation. Reading this through sex work foregrounds the centrality of that work to the logic of degeneration, although his critique here reverses this logic more than it subverts it.

163 Barton 1981, p. 51.



ILLUSTRATION 12 *Otto Dix, Prager Straße (Prague Street) 1920, oil on canvas with collage.*
 © ESTATE OF OTTO DIX/SODRAC (2014). PHOTO CREDIT: ALINARI/
 KUNSTMUSEUM, STUTTGART/ART RESOURCE, NY.

What is striking in *Prague Street* is not the contrast between disabled bodies and the implied able-bodied public of the humanist narrative, but rather the fact that *none* of the bodies in the image are in fact rendered as whole.¹⁶⁴ The man in the foreground has no legs, while the other people on the street are represented solely as body fragments: an arm and a hand on the left, and the leg and buttocks of a woman on the right. The dog and cat are likewise only parts, while the one 'whole' figure, the child at the shop window, is presented with her legs askew.

One of the key dimensions of *Prague Street* is the association of this bodily fragmentation with commerce and commodities. The beggar eking out a living from the coins thrown by shoppers contrasts sharply with the opulent displays of commodities in the stores. The shop windows also display dismembered bodies, this time of female mannequins. They are distanced from the beggar by their gender and their association with luxury and consumption, but they also reinforce the notion of bodily fragmentation. Where the gendered distinction is cemented is through the voluptuous woman moving out of the frame. Her buttocks loom over the man, the bright colours of her dress and her fleshy body contrasting strongly with the emaciated figure beneath. Her tall boots enhance her sexualisation, with the suggestion being that she is a sex worker. Once again we find the pairing of the disabled veteran and the prostitute, with the image again reading masculinity in terms of the grotesque body threatened by an excessive femininity.

The implications for a politics of disability are especially clear in Dix's 1920 *War Cripples* (*Kriegskrüppel*) which was exhibited in the first International Dada Fair in Berlin (Ill. 13).¹⁶⁵ Dix's work had alternate titles, notably *45% Fit for Employment* (*45% Erwerbsfähig*) – which threw an ironic light on state categorisations of disability for welfare claims – and subtitles, including 'a self-portrait' and 'four of these still don't add up to a whole person'. *War Cripples* uses similar devices to *Prague Street*, again juxtaposing the broken men with the various fragments of bodies behind them: a boot, an arm, a head. Wearing their uniforms and medals proudly, the men march down the street in a parody of a military parade. Various common injuries and disabilities are represented here. The first man displays Dix's fascination with facial injuries, while the second's shaking outline suggests shell shock, a physical manifestation of the psychological impact of war that, as I will discuss later, gained great prominence in the First World War. What the image suggests, however, is the absurdity

¹⁶⁴ Eberle 1985, p. 44 makes this point.

¹⁶⁵ It was also featured in the 'Degenerate Art' exhibition put on by the Nazis in Munich in 1937.



ILLUSTRATION 13 Otto Dix, *Die Kriegskrüppel (45% Erwerbsfähig)* (War Cripples [45% Fit for Service]), 1920, oil on canvas. The painting is presumed destroyed. This photograph shows War Cripples as it was displayed in the Nazi exhibition of 'Degenerate Art' at the gallery of the Munich Hofgarten in 1937.

© ESTATE OF MAX BECKMANN/SODRAC (2014). PHOTO CREDIT: BPK, BERLIN/ART RESOURCE, NY.

of the bodies. They embody a parodic militarism (and indeed the image can be read as a commentary on the participation of some disabled veterans in nationalist and militarist organisations), and their grotesque bodies take on an almost comic air. This grotesqueness is reappropriated for Dada; the montaged face of the last figure implies a direct link between Dadaist aesthetics and facial injuries.

As we saw earlier with his gendered images, Dix's critique of militarism here is at best oblique. As Dora Apel argues, Dix separates militarism from masculinity, his work stressing the 'desperate fight by the individual soldier-male against death and disfigurement', a potentially anti-war theme, but offering a regenerated masculinity marked by struggle and overcoming as his response.¹⁶⁶ In this sense the violence enacted on the bodies of the soldiers, like the graphic

166 Apel 1997, p. 384. See also pp. 369–75.

violence against women in many of his works, was in the service of a nostalgic recuperation of a coherent and whole male body and subjectivity.

This nostalgic desire was expressed explicitly in Dix's *Self-Portrait with My Son Jan* from 1930 (Ill. 14). As Maria Tatar argues, the painting serves as a powerful counterpoint to the rest of Dix's work, an anchor guaranteeing in the last instance the viability of the stable male artist-subject. Dix's interest in classical painting is evident here, the dramatically different aesthetics of the work underpinning the presentation of the recuperated male subject. 'In an act of artistic triumph, Dix erases the link between sexuality and creation, negates human mortality, and recreates himself as the artist who stands as the source of life and immortality. Here, the sensual woman who threatens to overwhelm and crush the creative artist is effaced to make room for the autogenous artist who has appropriated the procreative powers of women and gone them one better by producing a work of transcendent spiritual purity'.¹⁶⁷ Not only does the erasure of women here enable the work of the autogenous male artist, as Tatar argues, but, when the classically whole bodies here are read in the context of the fragmented bodies of the rest of his work, it also produces a powerful reconstitution of normative male bodies untouched by disability or the grotesque.

Dix's insistent association of disability with injured masculinity blocked any critical engagement with the politics of disability in the period, and especially with its implication in practices of labour. His approach represents an extreme version of the perspective that animated the work of much of the avant-garde, but there were alternative perspectives. Sella Hasse's 1919 *Blind War-Cripple at the Machine* (*Blinder Kriegskrüppel an der Maschine*), for example, is a woodcut of a worker operating a machine with a flesh and a prosthetic arm, his seeing-eye dog at his side (Ill. 15). Although bodily exceptionalism is clearly the theme of the work, it is presented in a matter-of-fact rather than grotesque fashion, although tinged with a melancholia reminiscent of Hasse's teacher, Käthe Kollwitz. Yet this is not simply the normalised or integrated worker that, as we saw earlier, was promoted by the rehabilitation industry. Hasse's worker may be 'rehabilitated', but the dark, enclosed factory and the worker's own expression suggests not a heroic overcoming, but an extension of conditions of alienated labour. Magnus Zeller's 1919 *Demonstrators* (*Demonstranten*), alternately entitled *Demonstration of the War Wounded* (*Demonstration der Kriegsbeschädigten*), likewise eschews the grotesque depictions of Frank and Dix (Ill. 16). Crutches and canes are in evidence, but it is the men's haunted eyes and drawn faces rather than their disabilities that suggest the damaging

167 Tatar 1995, p. 74.

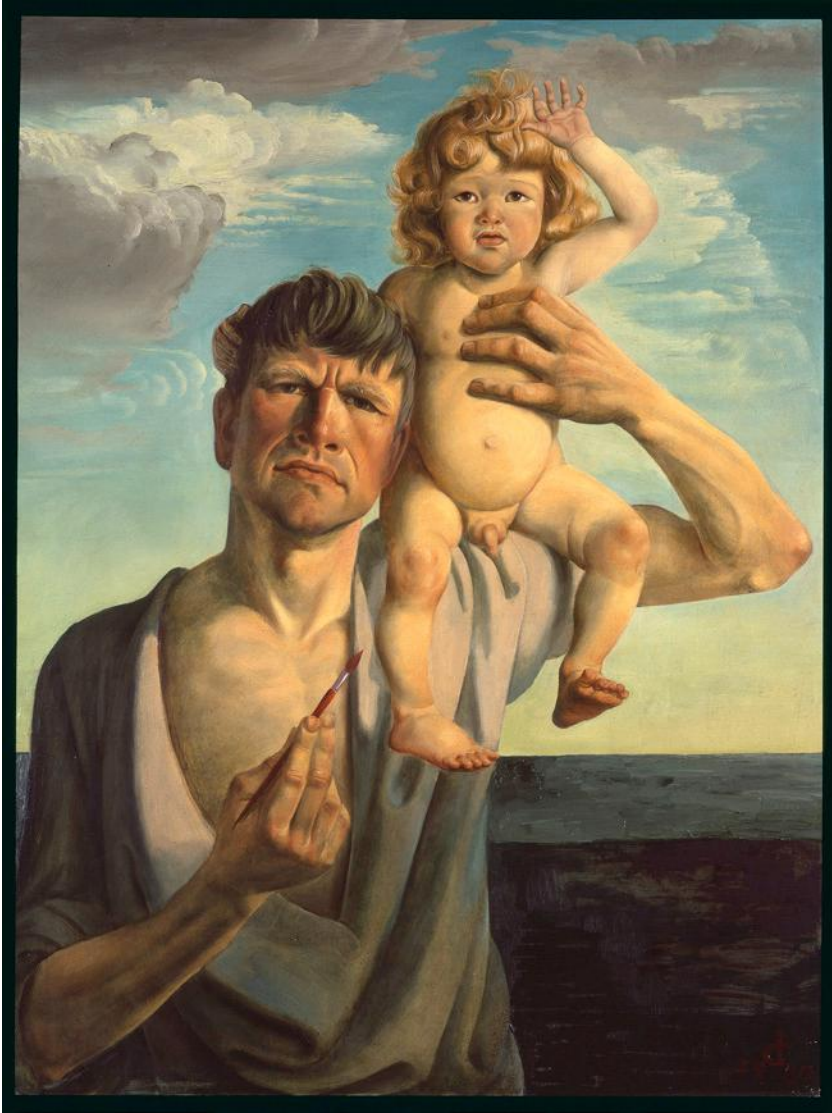


ILLUSTRATION 14 *Otto Dix, Selbstbildnis mit Jan (Self-Portrait with my Son Jan), 1930, painting/mixed media on wood, 119 × 90 cm.*

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HERMANN BURESCH/ART RESOURCE, NY.

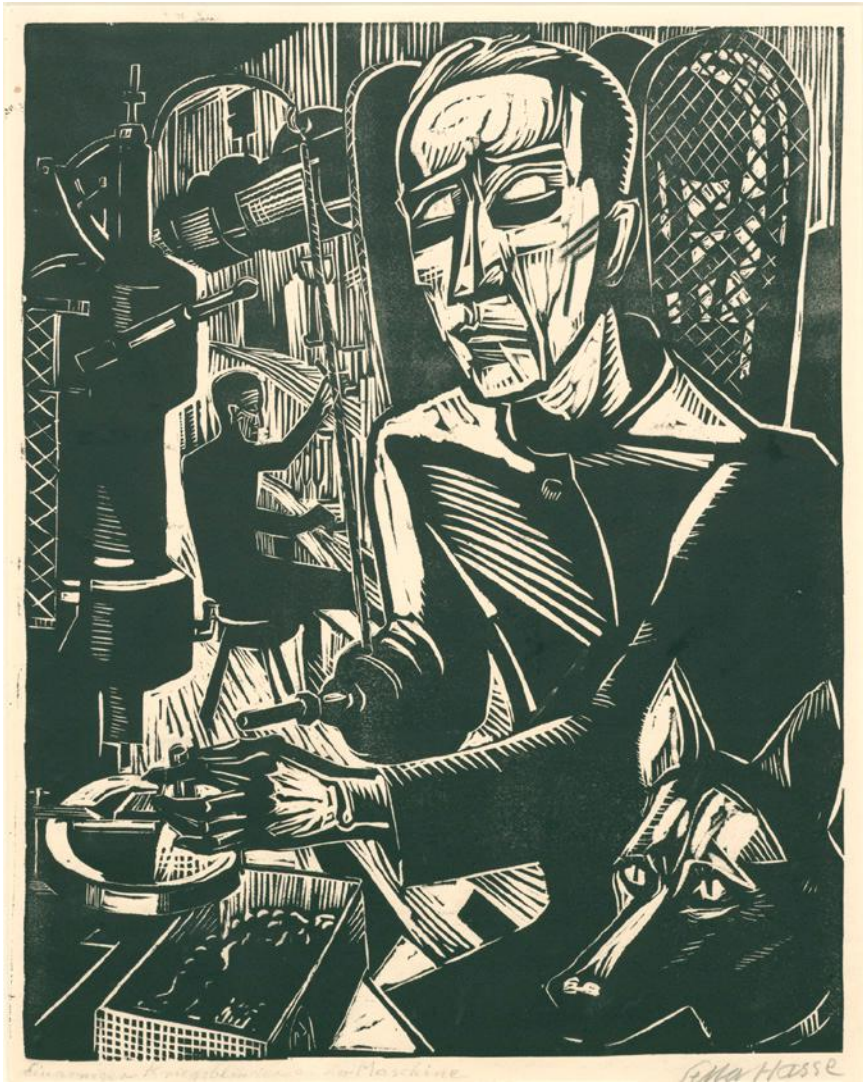


ILLUSTRATION 15 *Sella Hasse, Blinder Kriegskrüppel an der Maschine (Blind War Cripple at the Machine), 1919, Linocut, 50 × 39 cm. Image courtesy of the Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Kunstsammlung, Inv.-Nr.: 1 117.*



ILLUSTRATION 16 *Magnus Zeller, Demonstranten (Demonstrators), plate 6 of the portfolio Time of Revolution, circa 1920, lithograph on wove paper, 37.8 × 28.4 cm.*
© ESTATE OF MAGNUS ZELLER/SODRAC (2014). DIGITAL IMAGE © MUSEUM ASSOCIATES/LOS ANGELES COUNTY MUSEUM OF ART, GIFT OF MR. AND MRS. MARVIN FISHMAN. LICENSED BY ART RESOURCE, NY.

impact of war. Like Hasse, Zeller, who had participated as a delegate in the Berlin Workers' and Soldiers' Council, foregrounds the social rather than the bodily conditions of the veterans. It is the protest itself that holds out the promise of transformation, not a dream of bodily wholeness.

Heinrich Hoerle's work offers an even more striking contrast with that of Dix. Part of a loosely organised group of artists in Cologne calling themselves the 'group of progressive artists', Hoerle produced a series of works throughout the Weimar period that took up themes of disability. His 1923 *The European*, for instance, presented this generic figure as a stylised man stepping purposely forward on his prosthetic leg, a prosthetic arm swinging ahead of him. As this image suggests, Hoerle saw the disabled body as the archetypal modern body but, unlike with Dix, he invested his portrayals with a much more complex set of implications. Indeed, the 'group of progressive artists' in Cologne – which included Franz Wilhelm Seiwert and Gerd Arntz along with Hoerle – rejected the *neue Sachlichkeit* in general as well as the Verist stream of which Dix was the key figure. Hoerle had significant connections with Dada, but looked more to older forms of craft production for artistic inspiration, an aesthetic orientation that he and his colleagues combined with a commitment to a council communism. They sought, as Arntz put it, to produce an art combining the 'politically revolutionary' with the 'formally revolutionary'.¹⁶⁸

Hoerle shared the Dadaist conception of the contemporary body as irrevocably fragmented and alienated, but his figures tended to be more formal and geometrical than the ragged and proliferating bodies of Dada. Prostheses were especially prominent in Hoerle's work. Already in 1918–19 he produced a *Cripple Portfolio* that deployed disabled bodies as markers of difference, but over time his work shifted, the prosthetic body becoming indistinguishable from other contemporary bodies, especially labouring bodies.¹⁶⁹ Hoerle frequently depicted workers with hybrid bodies, but the prosthesis in his work was neither simply a symbol of technological modernism nor a marker of lack; rather, it marked the body as productive in a more complex sense. Hoerle's workers embodied neither heroic proletarianism nor absolute subjugation to the machine. He thus arguably captured the ambivalence of capitalist labour as both productive and repressive, enabling and disabling, but did not read bodily difference itself as the locus of that disability.

¹⁶⁸ Quoted in Roth 2008, p. 17.

¹⁶⁹ Dennis Crockett argues that by 1922 Hoerle had developed a more politicised perspective in which 'the worker and the war invalid were synonymous as victims of capitalism' (Crockett 1999, p. 81).

Hoerle's 1930 *Monument to the Unknown Prosthesis* (*Denkmal der unbekannten Prothesen*) is the most famous example of this tendency in his work (Ill. 17). Rather than the unknown soldier, it is the prosthetic that emerges as the hero of war. The work thus satirises the technological nationalism of the rehabilitation industry. But the two foregrounded figures in the painting are not themselves the source of satire. They are doubled, the black interior head of the man on the left evoking the severe facial injuries that Dix and Friedrich used to very different effect, while the impossible prosthetic head of the man on the right gestures perhaps to the psychological impacts of war. Both interior heads are inscribed in a 'whole' head, the interplay between the two elements of each head destabilising not only normative ideas of embodiment, but also the relationship between inside and outside. Like x-ray images that show the 'true' bodily structure beneath the skin, the interior, non-normative heads of the two men appear here as an inner truth of contemporary subjectivity. The figure in the background acts as a witness to the conversation between the other two, sitting alertly observing from his single eye, his black prosthetic hand at the ready. Interestingly, while that hand and the two interior heads are black, highlighted as prostheses, the hands of the two men in the foreground are not.



ILLUSTRATION 17 *Heinrich Hoerle, Denkmal der unbekannten Prothesen* (Monument to the Unknown Prosthesis), 1930, oil on board, 66.5 × 82.5 cm. IMAGE COURTESY OF THE VON DER HEYDT-MUSEUM WUPPERTAL.

Hoerle's work thus destabilises the nostalgic desire for the whole body. Prostheses mark the body as modern, but not as grotesque or as lacking. Hoerle's gender politics is interesting, if ambivalent, in this respect. In *Two Cripples and Woman* (*Zwei Krüppel und Frau*, 1931) the two male 'cripples' are similar to those in *Monument*, but in this case paired with a woman's figure represented as whole, her voluptuous curves contrasting with the linear bodies of the disabled men. The moment of nostalgic wholeness is thus gendered feminine, while the modern, the age of the prosthesis, is masculine. Earlier, however, in his series *Women* from 1919–21, Hoerle produced what was a very rare depiction of disabled women. In part his series evoked the mannequins that, as we saw with Dix, were a familiar medium through which the modern female body was represented, but this was not the case in *Figure with Corset* (*Figur im Korsett*, c. 1921, Ill. 18). Here an armless and hairless woman is depicted marching resolutely, one leg clad in a fashionable high-heeled boot, the other a prosthesis.

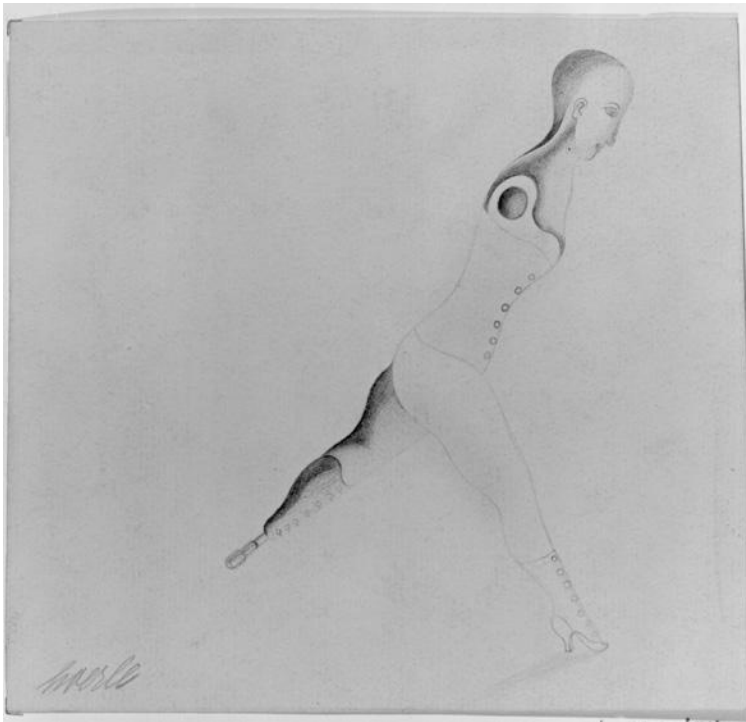


ILLUSTRATION 18 *Heinrich Hoerle, Nach rechts laufende Figur im Korsett, circa 1921, pencil on hand-made paper, 17.3 × 18.4 cm.*

KÖLN, MUSEUM LUDWIG (ML/Z 1978/054). PHOTO:

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RBA_D013160.

This last work is exceptional in shifting the representational terms of disability, both in terms of the sheer fact of this being a female figure, and in depicting her as one of the prosthetic figures who embody modern subjectivity. More generally in the period, from debates over welfare programmes to the plethora of images produced, it was male disability that was the focus. In this sense, then, the work of Dix, Frank, and others simply reflected the broader discursive context. The almost complete absence of disabled women from public discourse was in part due to the sheer number of disabled men in the aftermath of the War, but also reflected the profoundly masculine conceptions of labour that structured Weimar politics.

These themes were evident in Ernst Toller's play *Hinkemann*, which was staged initially in 1923, then rewritten and mounted again in 1924 to great scandal. In this play Toller treated disability not as a figure for a universal crisis of modern subjectivity, but rather as a concrete instance of a crisis of masculinity. Unlike with Dix's work, though, it is not the degenerative influence of the feminine that drives this crisis, nor does Toller present us with a nostalgic masculine wholeness as resolution. The play instead reads this crisis more concretely in terms of militarist ideologies, but also through the lens of class, a perspective different from his *Transformation* (the play we saw in the last chapter). Yet the play continued to reflect Toller's ambivalence about the communist left and his sympathy for Expressionist ideas of social transformation. As with his earlier work, the body emerges as the site of social contestation, with the limitations of the left read in terms of the inadequacy of their politics of embodiment. Thus, as with *Transformation*, in *Hinkemann* Toller is deeply attuned to the embodied dimensions of a radical politics.

The play revolves around the character Eugene Hinkemann ('hinken' in German means to limp, as well as to be inappropriate), a war veteran who in outward appearance is large, strong, and masculine, but who has returned castrated, one of those Hirschfeld called the 'eunuchs of war'.¹⁷⁰ Hinkemann's relationships with his wife, Margaret, and with his working-class and leftist milieu are profoundly shaped by his injuries. Margaret has an affair with Paul Grosshahn, a virile and masculine worker, to whom she reveals Hinkemann's secret. Grosshahn responds to this news by claiming that it would be a sin

170 Hirschfeld 1990, p. 341. Hirschfeld uses *Hinkemann* as an example in his discussion of the impact of genital wounds on (self-)conceptions of gender during and after the War (pp. 344–46). These injuries were not uncommon, although they were rarely acknowledged in the culture of the period.

for her to stay with Hinkemann, he 'who isn't a man – a sin against nature'.¹⁷¹ Hinkemann's castration thus marks the bodily site of the crisis of masculine subjectivity.

This crisis is bound up with Hinkemann's inability to find work. He eventually finds a job in a circus freak show – but ironically as a strong man who drinks the blood of rats and mice. The conflict between his hidden unmanning and his public performance of an extraordinary vampiric masculinity highlights the disjunctures of gendered identity formation. His work in the carnival, a central venue for the display of the grotesque, enables him to perform a masculinity that, according to essentialist notions of genital masculinity, should be inaccessible to him; this awareness only augments his humiliation.¹⁷² For Toller, this embodied crisis is both aesthetic and political, a point he makes explicit in the brief appearance of the tattooed woman Monachia who 'wears the greatest works of art of the old masters in front and the most modern, expressionist, futurist, dadaist confections behind'.¹⁷³ Her name is a feminine variant of Monachium, the Latin name for Munich, her body thus displaying the aesthetic duality that, at the time of the revolutionary upheavals in which Toller played such a central role, split the city.¹⁷⁴ Monachia's literal embodiment of this 'high' art in the context of the circus, a most crass form of mass culture, performs a carnivalesque reversal that takes the female body as its ground. The old masters are of course on the front of her body, the side of the classical nude, while the avant-garde occupies the rear, their artistic experiments associated – as it was so often in the avant-garde's own practices – with the lower bodily strata.

Margaret herself is torn by the situation, returning to Hinkemann after seeing him while on a visit to the circus with Grosshahn. But she is ultimately unable to reconcile herself to Hinkemann's condition, later committing suicide. Hinkemann too reaches the point of contemplating suicide, although the play leaves his fate open. Before we reach this point in the narrative, however, Toller outlines the political implications of Hinkemann's disability. Hinkemann

171 Toller 1991, p. 164. As Sabine Kienitz argues, this understanding of Hinkemann's condition reflected medical conceptions of genital masculinity, but also the experiences of men who had undergone involuntary castration. They, as well as their intimate partners, faced many of the issues traced out in the play (see Kienitz 2008, pp. 279–82).

172 Rosemary Garland-Thomson's work has been especially influential in working through the links between the politics of disability, different forms of embodiment, and practices of display in venues like the circus or the 'freak show' (see Garland-Thomson 1996 and 1997).

173 Toller 1991, p. 168.

174 Jelavich 1985, pp. 285–86.

sits in a pub debating politics with a group familiar from the concluding scenes of *Transformation*: a scientific socialist, a Christian, and a utopian-socialist or anarchist. From the scientific socialist – with his belief in the inevitability of revolution – Hinkemann demands to know what would happen in the new state to those who are wounded or mad. They will be humanely cared for, the socialist responds. Hinkemann suggests that there are more complex injuries, hinting at his own. The socialist responds:

There are no such people. People with healthy bodies have healthy souls. Common sense will tell you that. And people who are not right in their heads belong in an asylum.¹⁷⁵

Hinkemann rejects this socialist eugenics and presses the issue. He asks about eunuchs, giving the example of his ‘friend’ who, he says, was injured in such a way. The scientific socialist has no answer.

At this point Grosshahn comes in and starts to reveal Hinkemann’s secret; Hinkemann pre-empts him, confessing his condition and addressing his interlocutors:

Fools! You don’t know what it feels like – torture. What a change there’d have to be before you could build a better world . . . Words are all very fine for people in good health. But you don’t see the places you can’t reach. There are people you *can’t* make happy with all your states and society and family and community. Our sufferings begin where your cures end.¹⁷⁶

The people in the bar are moved by his speech, but Hinkemann leaves and begins to descend into madness, hallucinatory sequences interspersed with snatches of ‘reality’. He is visited by visions of the denizens of the post-War city, wounded soldiers and prostitutes prominent among them. Hinkemann, who has bought a phallic statue of Priapus, a fetish object connecting individual masculinity with social power, laments the inevitability of fate. The original version had Hinkemann preparing a noose for himself; the 1924 version, rewritten after left critics found the original too pessimistic, leaves him in this liminal state.

Hinkemann thus refuses the Expressionist narrative of overcoming so central to *Transformation*, but also rejects the alternative of a left social hygiene

¹⁷⁵ Toller 1991, p. 174.

¹⁷⁶ Toller 1991, pp. 178–79.

and the ideal of masculine working-class heroism. The narrative reflects the experiences of disabled veterans more broadly, who felt increasingly abandoned in the post-War years. In part this was due to a cultural tendency to repress the experience of the War, a point made in the play by the circus boss who tells Hinkemann that

the war's a back number now. Peepshow 'the horrors of war' won't earn sixpence. Nowadays Progress is the world. Hundred percent profit in it.¹⁷⁷

War held no interest to the commercial entertainment industry. At the same time, the 'progress' promised by the scientific socialist, on the other hand, offered little more hope than this sanitised capitalist vision. Toller's anti-capitalism thus linked a critique of progress with a deep suspicion of the masculinist ableism of the left. In its original version, the play was framed more explicitly as a critique of nationalism as well, the 1923 title being *The German Hinkemann*. Toller himself wanted to promote a more universalist meaning, dropping the 'German'. The right certainly continued to read it as an affront to the nation, however, mobilising against the play and disrupting its performances.¹⁷⁸

What is notable in the play is that Toller does not dwell on the metaphorical dimensions of Hinkemann's genital injuries, but has Hinkemann stressing their materiality. In this sense Toller was drawing on broader debates amongst doctors, psychiatrists, and other researchers on the 'eunuchs of war'. As Sabine Kienitz argues, genital injuries proved challenging to biological conceptions of gender, with both cultural and scientific responses seeking to reinscribe normative models of genital masculinity.¹⁷⁹ Toller drew on these anxieties to provoke a critical confrontation between the militarised masculinity of the nation, the proletarian masculinity of the scientific socialist, and the complex politics of the grotesque body. His challenge, however, gave rise to its own problems. Toller's account relied on stereotypes of working-class gender roles evident in Margaret's passive femininity and Grosshahn's crudely misogynist masculinity. As Richard McCormick argues of *Hinkemann*: '[a]ggressive proletarian masculinity and passive proletarian femininity are critiqued from the standpoint of a castrated hero who embodies the virtues of a somewhat androgynous and

¹⁷⁷ Toller 1991, p. 180.

¹⁷⁸ McCormick 2001, pp. 62–63.

¹⁷⁹ Kienitz 2008, pp. 282–86; Kienitz 1999.

enlightened (male) intelligentsia'.¹⁸⁰ For all his attention to the material body, Toller's vanguard figure is thus again marked by an Expressionist desire for the transcendence of that body and its base sexual instincts.

The desire for a reconstituted masculinity returns us to the rehabilitative politics of the period that sought to overcome the sense of bodily lack or loss so evident in *Hinkemann*. Where Hinkemann came up against the limits posed by the stigmatising and marginalising constitution of disability as a *social* phenomenon, rehabilitation offered the promise of an *individualised* transcendence of the body. Thus, in rehabilitation practices, 'the maimed body of the disabled veteran was bolstered by an incipient quasi-scientific identity politics centering on the concept of the *Krüppelseele* (cripple soul)'.¹⁸¹ The concept of the *Krüppelseele* did in some ways represent a new understanding of disability, incorporating a sense of bodily difference not wholly subsumed to the logic of degeneration. This perspective was articulated by the prominent orthopaedic surgeon Konrad Biesalski: '[j]ust as the amputation stump is not just a severed piece of arm or leg, but rather a new organ with its own biological laws, the cripple is not merely the distorted image of a healthy person; rather, through the interaction of the remaining powers a new, differently constituted yet self-contained unity of body and soul arises – a special biological person, whose own laws and capabilities must be studied before attempting to interfere with them'.¹⁸² Or, as Biesalski argued in a rather utopian speech to the Reichstag in January 1915 on the medical and rehabilitative possibilities now available to deal with war injuries and disabilities, 'there really is no condition of disability [*Krüppeltum*] any more'.¹⁸³ For the psychiatrist David Katz, writing in 1921, the prosthetic should thus not be experienced as a foreign element, but rather as part of an integrated body, which he argued involved 'giving the prosthesis a soul'.¹⁸⁴

Seemingly progressive, this conception of disability was profoundly ambivalent, in particular by effacing any sense of the material implications of different forms of disabled embodiment. Biesalski's understanding of disability

180 McCormick 2001, p. 71. He does argue, though, that *Hinkemann* 'nonetheless manages to undermine the ideology of the "strong male" that undergirds fascism – and many leftist analyses of fascism – in some very illuminating ways' (p. 60).

181 Fineman 1999, p. 97.

182 Quoted in Fineman 1999, p. 97.

183 Biesalski 1915, p. 9. The speech as a whole argues that all sectors of society need to be engaged to reintegrate those with disabilities into society and, especially, work, thus laying the groundwork not only for practices of rehabilitation, but also the post-War Law of the Severely Disabled.

184 Quoted in Neumann 2010, p. 105.

rooted it firmly in the technocratic and rationalising logic of the prosthetic and rehabilitation industry touched on earlier, an approach committed to the therapeutic value of work. He worked hard to promote this conception of disability, lobbying the state but also engaging in popular education, including the production of an educational film entitled *Krüppelnot und Krüppelhilfe*.¹⁸⁵ The technocratic and state-oriented nature of this approach was evident in Biesalski's stated goal of creating 'taxpayers rather than charity recipients!' He looked towards a future where the 'numerous war cripples should merge into the masses of the people as if nothing had happened to them'.¹⁸⁶ Unburdening the state of responsibility for care lurked behind these arguments, a budgetary imperative also underlying the diagnosis of *Rentenpsychose* (pension psychosis) that, as I will look at in the next section, proposed that reliance on state support was itself the source of disability.

Hinkemann implicitly challenges the rationalising impulse of the rehabilitation industry. Here the Expressionist desire for transcendence becomes more concrete, grounded on the one hand in the intractable materiality of bodily difference, and on the other in a rejection of a purely instrumental conception of bodies. Toller demands a revolutionary transformation of a social order that produces both bodily violence and the subsequent stigmatisation of its effects. This is a challenge he poses both to capitalist society as a whole, and to the left. What he proposes is an alternative understanding of the body that stands in opposition to ideas of degeneration. In tracing out a radical *Krüppelseele*, Toller suggests that disabling social practices are simultaneously psychological and bodily, signalling the need for a dramatic reconceptualisation of subjectivity as part of a radical political project. The impasse at the play's end remained insufficiently 'optimistic' to some of its socialist critics, but it was precisely here that Toller's challenge to the left was posed. This psychological dimension, as I will argue in the next section, was central to the complex debates over aesthetic and political radicalism that shaped the culture of the period.

185 Thomalla 1922c, p. 20.

186 Quoted in Poore 2007, p. 8. This orientation to disability was given a much more radical direction in the work of Kurt Goldstein, whose work with soldiers who suffered cortical injuries led him to argue that scientific examination itself was part of the process through which normality and abnormality was constituted. Symptoms displayed cannot be understood as part of the internal economy of the organism, he argued in 1934, but 'are attempted solutions to problems derived on the one hand from the demands of the natural environment and on the other from the special tasks imposed on the organism in the course of the examination' (Goldstein 1995, p. 35).

4.5 Outsider Art: Asylums and the Cultural Politics of Madness

The psychological dimensions of the War were captured most explicitly in the emerging diagnosis of shell shock. This was a medical diagnosis, but it simultaneously informed the broader cultural understandings of war. For Franz Kafka, as he put it in a 1916 letter: '[t]he great war which encompasses the sum total of human misery is also a war on the nervous system, more a war on the nervous system than any previous war... Just as the intensive industrialization of the past decades of peace has attacked, affected, and caused disorders of the nervous system of those engaged in industry more than ever before, so the enormously increased mechanization of present-day warfare presents the gravest dangers and disorders to the nervous system of fighting men'.¹⁸⁷ As Kafka's comments suggest, ideas of shell shock drew on earlier diagnoses of the impact of urban industrial society so central to theories of degeneration. Medical diagnoses like 'railway spine' were part of broader tendencies to theorise modernity in terms of shock. Indeed, as Greg Eghigian argues, the development of welfare systems were themselves built on discourses of trauma and shock, reconceptualising the social body as a locus of intervention through insurance and risk management that simultaneously worked to depoliticise social issues; insurance 'would presumably do this by translating the redistributive conflict between employers and workers into insurance's technical discourse of risks and accidents'.¹⁸⁸ 'Nerves' and 'nervousness' were the bodily symptoms of these diverse modern shocks.

Diagnoses of shell shock fit seamlessly with the dichotomisation between the deserving and the undeserving that underlay practices of social welfare. The military and medical establishments tended to see shell shock or other related psychological issues as the result of pre-existing degenerative conditions, with the affected soldiers (much like the 'work-shy' recipients of social welfare) often treated as 'anti-social', as shirkers on whom the doctors could enact a cure.¹⁸⁹ As Andreas Killen argues, by 1914 traumatic neuroses had been reframed as individual rather than social, 'recasting the old somatic model of sick nerves in a new psychological idiom'.¹⁹⁰ This tendency was strengthened dramatically over the course of the War, with psychiatry and psychoanalysis cementing their institutional legitimacy by gaining control over the treatment

187 Quoted in Löwy 1992, p. 88. Löwy argues that Kafka's 'The Penal Colony', written in October 1914, can thus be read as a commentary on the machinery of war.

188 Eghigian 2001, p. 99.

189 Eckart 2000; Ulrich 1993.

190 Killen 2006, p. 82.

of shell shock. As with physical disability, therapy was individualised and configured through the language of will.

Especially when it came to war-related conditions, this individualising and medicalising process was bound up with the state's financial obligations. It was here that the diagnoses of 'pension psychosis' (*Rentenpsychose*) or 'pension neurosis' (*Rentenneurose*) noted above came into play. These diagnoses held pensions themselves to be the source of disorder, with 'neuroses' produced by the desire to collect money. Konrad Biesalski was relatively generous in his reading of the problem, acknowledging in his 1915 speech to the Reichstag that the attempt to extract support was human nature, practiced by millionaires as much as the working classes.¹⁹¹ Many other Weimar-era psychiatrists, doctors, and officials were much less willing to see this as a universal problem, contending that the working class was much more prone to such disorders. Especially in the aftermath of the War, these claims of the working class undermining the health of state finances dovetailed to an extent with the myth of the stab in the back.¹⁹²

Both the SPD and KPD rejected such claims, arguing that the state should provide pensions for those with psychiatric disabilities. The KPD held that psychiatry was in league with the bourgeois state and capital in suppressing the memory and trauma of war, thus evading responsibility for it and sustaining support for militarism.¹⁹³ As a KPD official argued in 1927: 'in explaining war hysteria, it is the new method to say that these illnesses already existed in their [patients'] youth and thus have nothing to do with the war, or that they occurred after the war and are symptoms of age. The war and its consequences are thus supposed to be struck from the consciousness of the people, so that they will agree to new imperialist goals of the German bourgeoisie against Soviet Russia'.¹⁹⁴

For many critics on the left, war itself was the locus of madness. In *War Against War!*, Ernst Friedrich exhorted readers: 'show these pictures to all men who still can think! He who then still believes in this mass butchery, let him be locked up in a mad-house, let us avoid him as we do the plague!'¹⁹⁵ Otto Dix drew heavily on associations between war and madness, representing its impact through images of madness. The shell-shocked veteran in *War Cripples* is one example, while his *War* portfolio included a number of others, including

191 Biesalski 1915, pp. 9–10.

192 Eghigian 2001; Crouthamel 2002.

193 Crouthamel 2002, pp. 166–69.

194 Crouthamel 2002, p. 177.

195 Friedrich 1987, p. 22.

Night Encounter with a Madman and *The Madwoman of Ste. Marie-a-Py*. As with Dix's other work, these figures of madness are ambivalent; they suggest the destructive impact of war, but also present madness as a threat to the psychological coherence of the male viewer. The mad *woman* performs this gendering especially strongly.

The cultural politics of madness was complex, however. As we saw in the introduction to the book, theories of degeneration had long presented modernism itself as a form of madness, but modernist artists and writers in turn appropriated madness as a source of creative inspiration. We can see this at work in extreme form in the tendency of Dix, Grosz, and others to style themselves as sex murderers, but it emerged in many other ways as well. Yet, there was an important disjuncture at the heart of the Weimar modernist and avant-garde conceptualisation of madness. Many artists and art critics had themselves come into contact with psychiatric and medical establishments during the War, and psychiatric confinement was used frequently against pacifists, left-radicals, and radical artists (as we saw earlier in the case of Ernst Toller). Grosz himself had already been institutionalised during the War, although in his case had apparently simulated epilepsy in order to avoid service. Others, including Conrad Felixmüller, Max Beckmann, and Erich Heckel, worked as orderlies or in other capacities in asylums and hospitals during the War. Christian Schad had a more privileged relationship to the asylum, being invited by the director of a local institution in Geneva in 1918 to sketch and paint inmates.¹⁹⁶ These experiences were by no means limited to Germany. André Breton, for example, identified his work as a medical student in a military hospital as a key source for Surrealism. The transnational avant-garde's fascination with asylums and hospitals provides a powerful, if understudied, current by which to understand their development.¹⁹⁷

After the War attacks on modernist and avant-garde artists continued to draw on ideas of degeneration, with obscenity charges brought against Dix, Grosz, and others involving claims of psychiatric disturbance.¹⁹⁸ Despite all of

196 Lloyd 2003, p. 18; Augat 2003, pp. 23–24. Interestingly, Schad, who later became a key figure in the *neue Sachlichkeit* movement, was at the time working in a more cubo-futurist idiom. However, the paintings that came out of his asylum visits, most notably *In the Asylum Garden*, were done in a more realist style. This contradicted the tendency of many avant-garde artists to depict madness through an aesthetics of fragmentation and dissonance. Schad's more prosaic depictions were arguably much more closely attuned to the materiality of the institution in this respect.

197 See Annette Becker 2000 for a discussion that focuses on Dada and Surrealism.

198 McCloskey 1997, p. 33.

these direct experiences with the institutional politics of madness, however, modernist and avant-garde artists tended to configure madness as a primal, extra-historical source of creative energy. This idea of madness drew on the desire discussed in the previous chapter of accessing a mode of being and creative production unencumbered by the fragmenting and deadening layers of modern existence. It was this approach that largely divorced ideas of madness from their institutional contexts. That is, the social practices by which madness was diagnosed and through which those so diagnosed were institutionalised were largely absent from aesthetic debates. Indeed, the great paradox here is that madness, which led so often to incarceration and confinement, was presented as a marker of freedom.

The most notable text elaborating this approach to the aesthetics of madness was Hans Prinzhorn's 1922 *Artistry of the Mentally Ill* (*Bildnerei der Geisteskranken*). Prinzhorn was in a rather unique position to author such a text. He had a background in art criticism and art history but subsequently turned to the study of medicine and psychiatry. After the War he took up a position at the Heidelberg Psychiatric Clinic where the chief psychiatrist, Karl Wilmanns, had established an extensive collection of art produced by asylum inmates. Prinzhorn dramatically enlarged the collection during his three years there, bringing in work from psychiatric institutions across Europe; the collection eventually included over 5,000 pieces.¹⁹⁹ This artistic production formed the raw material for his influential book, which set the stage for the subsequent emergence of the field of 'outsider art'.²⁰⁰ What is striking, however, is that while Prinzhorn worked in an asylum and used the work of inmates, his book sought to elaborate an aesthetic of madness in which the materiality of the institution and the life of the inmates was largely erased.

Despite his use of the generic 'mental illness' in the title, Prinzhorn was particularly interested in the work of inmates diagnosed as schizophrenics, their works making up 75 percent of those he used in the book. Along with many others in the period, he saw schizophrenia as particularly important in aesthetic terms. Schizophrenia was itself a very new term at the time. It was advanced in 1911 by Eugen Bleuler who, influenced by psychoanalysis, developed the

199 Foy 1972, pp. ix–x; Bowler, 1997, pp. 15–16.

200 The term was popularised by Roger Cardinal in his 1972 book by the same name, which drew on Prinzhorn's work as well as that of Jean Dubuffet and his notion of 'art brut'. The term 'outsider art' has been associated primarily with the art of those diagnosed with psychiatric or cognitive disabilities, but has also come to encompass that of a range of other marginalised cultural producers, generally with no formal artistic training. For a critical analysis of the field see also MacLagan 2009; Cubbs 1994; MacGregor 1989.

concept through a reworking of the diagnosis of *dementia praecox* popularised in Emil Kraepelin's descriptive psychiatry. (This was the same Kraepelin who, as a staunch counter-revolutionary activist in Munich, used this diagnosis in his psychiatric clinic to incarcerate radicals, including Toller).²⁰¹ Bleuler's aim had been to clarify the diagnostic category, arguably with limited success;²⁰² indeed, the utility of the diagnosis of schizophrenia continues to be debated, even while its use as a troubling metaphor for the modern condition continues unabated.²⁰³

Bleuler's diagnosis was grounded on the idea that, as he wrote in 1911: 'the most severe schizophrenics, who have no more contact with the outside world, live in a world of their own . . . This detachment from reality, together with the relative and absolute predominance of the inner life, we term autism'.²⁰⁴ Prinzhorn took up Bleuler's understanding, describing the key characteristic of the schizophrenic as a subordination of the distinction of the 'real' and the 'unreal' to the authority of the ego, the creation of a self-contained world that, from the perspective of 'reality', appears entirely arbitrary.²⁰⁵ Prinzhorn insisted, however, that schizophrenia was not opposed to normal mental life. Normal perception itself transforms the world into personally determined eidetic images; what differentiates schizophrenia is only that this becomes a completely internal or autistic process. This autistic condition can, however, be experienced by 'normal' people in dreams or in psychoanalytic free association.²⁰⁶ This caused Prinzhorn some unease, asserting in a footnote that the 'dissolution of fixed definitions of illness' might conflict with 'efforts

201 Perhaps unaware of Kraepelin's politics, Breton wrote to Théodore Fraenkel during the Battle of Verdun in September 1916: 'Dementia, paranoia, twilight states. O! What German poetry, Freud and Kraepelin' (quoted in Annette Becker 2000, p. 76).

202 Bleuler 1952, pp. 3–12.

203 The work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari is perhaps best known for combining both a clinical and a metaphorical use of the idea of schizophrenia in offering a critical framework for capitalist modernity (see especially Deleuze and Guattari 1983). Louis Sass traces the history of the use of ideas of schizophrenia in modernist cultural production, including by Deleuze and Guattari, and challenges claims that it offers an inherently creative and emancipatory response to the strictures of modern life. For an argument against the utility of schizophrenia as a coherent diagnostic category and an excellent history of its emergence, see Boyle 2002; her discussion of Bleuler's contributions are on pp. 63–76.

204 Bleuler 1952, p. 63.

205 Prinzhorn 1972, pp. 37–40.

206 Prinzhorn 1972, pp. 39–40.

to delimit real illnesses, which strictly speaking can be possible only on the basis of physical symptoms'.²⁰⁷

In the final section of the book Prinzhorn takes a tentative further step, arguing that schizophrenia could perhaps even be seen as a characteristic of the age and suggesting very hesitantly the beginnings of a social critique of schizophrenia and mental illness.²⁰⁸ Others in the period developed this point more explicitly. In Hermann Hesse's 1927 novel *Steppenwolf*, for example, the main character comes to recognise that the self is not the unitary whole of Western rationality, but rather multiple. 'Schizophrenia', for Hesse, is the name science gives to the seeming madness of those who resist the strictures of the West.²⁰⁹ Here we see an extreme version of the celebration of madness, although Prinzhorn does not go nearly this far. While he sees schizophrenia as existing on a continuum with other forms of consciousness, he seeks to hang on to the diagnostic authority of the psychiatrist by insisting that schizophrenia proper remains a distinct disorder.

In aesthetic terms, however, Prinzhorn is left with the dilemma of trying to distinguish the creative expression of the 'mentally ill', which proves difficult given that he is unable to identify concrete characteristics in their work. He attempted to do so through a phenomenological analysis influenced in part by Freudian and Jungian psychology, and especially by Ludwig Klages' studies of handwriting and character.²¹⁰ In formal respects, he found, the work of schizophrenics shared characteristics not only with that of children or primitives, but also in some cases with formal art, specifically Expressionism. Ultimately, though, it is the psychiatric diagnosis that grounds his aesthetic judgement, and that differentiates the schizophrenic clearly from the artist. Characteristic of the former, he argues, is their inability to do anything else and the complete detachment of their work from any connection with the 'real'.²¹¹ So, while he

207 Prinzhorn 1972, p. 38n23.

208 This ambivalence is not generally recognised in the secondary literature on Prinzhorn which, even in the case of otherwise very perceptive studies, tends to see him as completely uncritical in relation to the significance of institutional and social practices (see Brand-Claussen 1996, pp. 13–14).

209 Hesse 1963, pp. 218–20.

210 Prinzhorn 1972, pp. 6–7. Using Freud and Jung, he argues that psychoanalysis can help to come to grips with the symbols in the works, which he situates in relation to ancient symbolic systems related especially to religion and eroticism, but which are repressed through civilisational impulses (pp. 240–42).

211 Prinzhorn 1972, pp. 263–68. Even here, though, he suggests an alternative explanation, placing a significant weight on the isolation experienced in psychiatric institutions as a source of the lack of connection with reality, and speculating that similar conditions

acknowledges their image-making as significant, this is not true art, a claim that echoes Freud's argument in *Totem and Taboo* (1913) that 'a case of hysteria is a caricature of a work of art'.²¹² For Freud as for Prinzhorn, art is the last field in which the 'omnipotence of thoughts' characteristic of neuroses is given free, yet conscious, rein.²¹³ Adorno and Horkheimer perform a dialectical reversal here, arguing that this view 'which Freud anachronistically attributes to magic applies only to the more realistic form of world domination achieved by the greater astuteness of science'.²¹⁴

Prinzhorn was unable to fully resolve his profound ambivalence and anxiety over the instability of the intersecting boundaries of illness and art. His tendency to relegate these doubts to footnotes is arguably symptomatic of his desire to suppress these implicit challenges to psychiatric and aesthetic authority. It is his repeated assertion of schizophrenic cultural production as pre-conscious, linked to children and primitives, that sustains the authority of the 'sane' critic/diagnostician. As Bettina Brand-Claussen points out, the demand for a 'pure' autistic art also required Prinzhorn to ignore the extent of the artistic training many of the inmates had received.²¹⁵ The language of the book reflects this distancing. In the title and elsewhere Prinzhorn uses the terms *Bildneri*, more literally translated as 'image-making', and *Gestaltung* (forming, shaping) rather than derivations of *Kunst* (art) to characterise the works of the inmates. As with other modernists, though, what Prinzhorn truly sought was the originary creative source on which, he believed, schizophrenics unconsciously and artists consciously drew. This he called a universal 'expressive urge' (*Gestaltungsdrang*) out of which all creative impulses flowed.²¹⁶

Prinzhorn's work thus provided a crucial systematisation of the links between madness and artistic radicalism that both enabled the appropriation of the art of those diagnosed as mad, and sustained the authority of both the psychiatric profession and the artist. It was on these grounds that he legitimised Expressionism and other modernist art against the critics who read it through the lens of degeneration. For example, the liberal critic Wilhelm Weygandt, a student of Kraepelin, denounced Expressionism in a 1921 article

might be found in convents and prisons (pp. 268–70). He later went on to produce a work on *The Artistry of Prisoners (Bildneri der Gefangenen)* that developed these arguments (Prinzhorn 1926).

212 Freud 1950, p. 73.

213 Freud 1950, p. 90.

214 Horkheimer and Adorno 2002, p. 7.

215 Brand-Claussen 1996, pp. 11–12.

216 Prinzhorn 1972, pp. 6–7.

on 'Art and Madness' as 'a symptom of degeneration of our sick era'.²¹⁷ Those on the right were even more virulent in their attacks. Prinzhorn's work was thus profoundly important in that it resisted these condemnations of modernist art. But this defence came at a price: the reinforcement of the radical alterity of the schizophrenic condition through his simultaneously aesthetic and psychiatric diagnoses of autism. Against the 'philistines' who were denouncing modernism by 'infer[ring] an equality of the underlying psychic conditions from external similarities' that might be found in the works themselves, Prinzhorn maintained the autonomy and value of art by virtue of its *conscious* production.²¹⁸ Coming close to Bloch in his reading of Expressionism, although without the dimension of political hope, Prinzhorn argued that 'expressionism is a symptom of the decline and an attempt to make the best of it'.²¹⁹

Prinzhorn's work influenced a range of artists, including Max Ernst, Paul Klee, and Alfred Kubin.²²⁰ The Bauhausler Oskar Schlemmer was at one of Prinzhorn's talks in 1920 and wrote to his future wife Helena Tutein of the 'very interesting images, utterly surprising similarities with Moderns; Klee, for example, who has seen the pieces and was enthusiastic'.²²¹ Like Prinzhorn, though, Schlemmer saw a fundamental difference between the two forms of expression: 'the madman occupies the realm of ideas that the healthy strives for, but for the former it is purer because completely divorced from external reality'.²²² Prinzhorn's influence on Schlemmer was evident also in the latter's manifesto for the first Bauhaus exhibition in 1923 in which he argued that in the post-War period: '[b]reaking the limitations of classical aesthetics reinforced boundlessness of feeling, which found nourishment and verification in the discovery of the East and the art of the Negro, peasants, children, and the

217 Quoted in Weber-Jasper 1996, p. 218. Weygandt joined the Nazi Party after 1933, but was a member of the left-liberal German Democratic Party (DDP) through much of the 1920s (see Weber-Jasper 1996, pp. 213–322; Röske 2003, pp. 14–15).

218 Prinzhorn 1972, p. 271. He goes on to say that '[t]he conclusion that a painter is mentally ill because he paints like a given mental patient is no more intelligent than another; *viz.*, that Pechstein and Heckel are Africans from the Camerouns because they produce wooden figurines like those by Africans from the Camerouns' (p. 271). Here we have a key dilemma of the primitivist moment in his work to which I will return later.

219 Prinzhorn 1972, p. 272.

220 Hal Foster 2004, pp. 193–223 gives a powerful reading of the connections between Prinzhorn's work and that of Paul Klee and Max Ernst, although his psychoanalytic approach does not address the social contexts of madness with which I am concerned here.

221 Schlemmer 1990, p. 63.

222 Ibid.

insane. The origin of artistic creation was as much sought after as its limits were courageously extended'.²²³

This association of limit-breaking with the mad or the primitive was ubiquitous among radical Weimar artists, although their appropriation of the subject position or artistic production of these imagined figures only occasionally engaged with the actual limits imposed on those diagnosed as mad. Prinzhorn's work was notable in that, at the margins of his text, we find traces of this contradiction between realities of institutionalisation and the desire for limit-breaking, a kind of bad conscience that he could not entirely suppress. Nevertheless, *Artistry of the Mentally Ill* is remarkable for the extent to which Prinzhorn erased the fact of institutionalisation. It is impossible to reconcile the fact, he says, that 'sociologically they [patient-artists] are merely "institutional inmates," "mental patients," and objects of care by physicians and the state'. 'We are not afraid', he goes on, 'to allow the glaring contrast between their physical social existence and their psychic one, which extends into the realm of culture without their "knowing what they do," to stand'.²²⁴ Here Prinzhorn clearly identifies the contradiction at the heart of his project, but then sets it neatly aside.

Prinzhorn's suppression of these institutional contexts is especially surprising given the massive upheavals the War produced in asylums and on the psychiatric profession, changes of which he had to be acutely aware. As noted earlier, psychiatry and psychoanalysis had gained prestige by treating shell shock during the War. Schizophrenia, so central to Prinzhorn's work, became a key diagnostic category for the condition.²²⁵ Prinzhorn, however, used the work of inmates who had been confined since before the War, which made it easier for him to retain a sense of the condition as extra-social, and ignore the devastating psychological impact of the War. Even for pre-existing asylum populations, though, the War proved devastating, with around 30 percent of inmates dying of hunger and disease, casualties of a deliberate redirection of food, resources, and care away from people who were deemed expendable. As Karl Bonhoeffer put it rather chillingly in his address to the annual conference of the German Psychiatric Association in 1920, the War had inaugurated 'a change in the concept of humanity. I simply mean that we were forced by the terrible exigencies of war to ascribe a different value to the life of the individual than was the case before'.²²⁶

223 Schlemmer 1970, p. 69.

224 Prinzhorn 1972, p. 95.

225 Lerner 2003; Radkau 1998; Killen 2006 pp. 128–33; Whalen 1984, pp. 61–65.

226 Quoted in Burleigh 1994, p. 11.

Drawing this direct link between Prinzhorn's aesthetic theory and the killing of asylum inmates is perhaps unfair. He was, after all, writing in the context of growing trends in eugenics towards eliminationist solutions to perceived demographic and social hygienic threats; finding worth in the art of those diagnosed as degenerate offered an implicit challenge to those approaches. Still, Prinzhorn's own separation of material institutional realities from artistic production in his aesthetic theory prevented him from extending this recognition to the inmates themselves, and indeed allowed him to claim an interpretive authority over their works by virtue of denying them a conscious part in their own creative practice. A very similar claim to knowledge underlay psychiatric and eugenic projects. Bonhoeffer's pronouncement was, of course, more dangerous in that it claimed authority over life and death, but he too staked this claim on the grounds that inmates lacked true consciousness.

A further crucial dimension of these diagnoses was the fact that they themselves were based on aesthetic judgements, a point that remained unaddressed in Prinzhorn's work. I have already noted the centrality of aesthetic judgement to diagnoses of degeneration. We can see this emerge more fully in the exterminationist arguments that, as Bonhoeffer's claims would suggest, gained credibility in the post-War period. The most infamous of these early arguments for 'euthanasia', the murder of those deemed degenerate, came in Karl Binding's and Alfred Hoche's 1920 *Permission for the Destruction of Life Unworthy of Life*. In part because the language and proposals were similar to later Nazi eugenics laws, their argument has drawn significant attention. Indeed, Paul Weindling argues more broadly that '[c]ompulsory sterilization and "euthanasia" were the medical counterparts of the *Freikorps* and the first full flush of Nazism' in the early 1920s.²²⁷ I am arguing something similar here, but with a strong qualification; while these ideas were certainly crucial in enabling the rise of Nazism, they were different from the *Freikorps* in that, as we have seen, they were by no means exclusively located on the right. Across the political spectrum, including on the left, eugenic ideas were gaining steam. For the social-democratic doctor G.F. Nicolai, for example, those physically or psychologically disabled by war were little different from the hereditary unfit. 'It is true that they continue to live; for the general public, though, they are as good as dead, as their possibilities of work and activity are closed to them.'²²⁸ Nicolai was not advocating euthanasia here, but we again see the association of disability, work, and, ultimately, death. As I discussed in the introduction to

227 Weindling 1989, p. 397.

228 Nicolai 1919, p. 82.

the book, Nicolai's work was notable especially for its application of aesthetic criteria in his determination of 'unfitness'.

The political heterogeneity of eugenics was evident with Binding and Hoche as well, with the former a corporatist liberal rather than a radical right activist. Their book saw Binding addressing juridical matters and Hoche medical approaches. They argued that, in view of the contra-selective impact of the War, issues of fitness and worth had become of overwhelming importance to the nation.²²⁹ Indeed, given these difficult contexts, the care lavished on those with 'existences of negative value' was a travesty.²³⁰ The aesthetic judgement grounding their claims becomes clear in their elaboration of who would be covered by the legal framework of euthanasia. Binding suggests that three groups should be targeted: first, those who, in the face of incurable illness or mortal wounds, unequivocally expressed the desire to end their own lives; second, 'incurable idiots (*Blödsinnigen*)', both by birth and those who became so later in life, and who he argues 'form a terrible counter-image of real human beings, and awaken horror in virtually all who meet them – although naturally not in all!';²³¹ and finally otherwise healthy people who had been severely injured and rendered unconscious in battle, but who would be appalled by their condition should they awake. In those cases, he argues, relatives and doctors should instigate a quasi-judicial procedure in which, as with the first group, a committee of a doctor, a lawyer, and a psychiatrist would make a determination based on how they imagined they would choose for themselves in such a situation.²³²

The aesthetic dimensions of these judgements are clear in the language used. 'Horror' serves as a key medico-aesthetic ground for sterilisation and euthanasia. The designation of people with developmental disabilities as 'counter-images' of humans underlines this judgement. This language was borrowed in a 1921 article in *Die Tat*, which likewise described candidates for euthanasia as 'terrible counter-images of real humans'.²³³ While this integration of aesthetic and scientific judgement was widespread, it was Paul Schultze-Naumburg's infamous 1928 tract *Art and Race* that made the connection to art explicit,

229 As noted in the first chapter, the idea of contra-selection drew on Darwinist and social Darwinist ideas to argue that rather than promoting the survival of the fittest, modern warfare enabled the weak and the degenerate to survive, thus accelerating processes of degeneration.

230 Binding and Hoche 1920, p. 27. Of course, as we saw from the massive asylum death rates, this alleged care was non-existent.

231 Binding and Hoche 1920, p. 32.

232 Binding and Hoche 1920, pp. 29–34.

233 Quoted in Weipert 2006, p. 196.

taking up in the process the older argument linking degenerate madness and modernist art. Schultze-Naumburg illustrated this argument graphically through the juxtaposition of photographs of people with non-normative bodies and the canvases of modernist and avant-garde artists. Where Prinzhorn sought to radically distance the artwork from the artist, rendering the artistry of the mentally ill accessible for appropriation, Schulze-Naumburg performed precisely the opposite operation, assimilating the one to the other.²³⁴ Across the emerging spectrum of eugenic practices, then, aesthetic judgement became central to the production of certain bodies and psyches as 'unfit'.

The aesthetic diagnosis of 'horror' fed the eliminationist tendency in eugenics that grew in strength over the Weimar period, with even socialist social hygienists like Alfred Grotjahn expressing sympathy for more limited interventions like forced sterilisation.²³⁵ Despite this growing support, neither forced sterilisation nor euthanasia was implemented at a state level in the pre-Nazi years. Indeed, even strong advocates of eugenics had their qualms about forced sterilisation, let alone euthanasia. For instance, in his volume of the canonical work on racial hygiene Fritz Lenz stressed the legal difficulties in implementing programmes of sterilisation, especially when it was not voluntary. As he notes, however, when prompted by proper arguments made by medical professionals, those of less worth (*Minderwertige*) could come to such a decision themselves, a potentially very loose definition of 'voluntary'. As with so many proponents of sterilisation, Lenz looked to the American example for inspiration, stressing that it could work with the proper state oversight.²³⁶

Opponents of eugenic sterilisation also picked up on the American connection, one doctor arguing in 1914 that '[w]e know so little about heredity that we must not get involved with it. I consider the whole business to be typically American'.²³⁷ Resistance to these negative eugenic practices was centred on the left, although the Catholic Church also mounted a strong opposition in part because of worries that eugenic interventions could lead to women's access to contraceptive sterilisation or to abortion.²³⁸ Lenz himself saw abortion as valuable on grounds of racial hygiene, but he stressed that this should be restricted to eugenic cases and not be opened up for contraceptive purposes

²³⁴ Schultze-Naumburg 1928.

²³⁵ Usborne 1992, pp. 148–50. Grotjahn was a member of the Berlin Society for Racial Hygiene alongside Erwin Baur.

²³⁶ Lenz 1921, pp. 125–32. The volume also included the contributions of Erwin Baur and Eugen Fischer, with Lenz the most prominent figures in the field.

²³⁷ Quoted in Woycke 1988, p. 47.

²³⁸ Weipert 2006, pp. 169–70; Hong 1998, pp. 261–71; Burleigh 1994, pp. 20–42.

‘as the individualistic women’s movement would support and that the Social Democratic side brought forward as a proposal in the Reichstag in 1920’.²³⁹

These debates over sterilisation, euthanasia, and contraception went to the heart of conceptions of population politics and ideas of the *Volkskörper*; in the final chapter I will return to struggles over reproductive rights in more detail. What the discussion here suggests, however, is that artistic debates over madness need to be understood in relation to these broader practices of eugenics and social hygiene. While Prinzhorn largely suppressed discussion of these connections, there were a number of artists and writers who offered more critical accounts of the social production of madness. These artists and writers were drawn to the idea that madness offered access to primal sources of creative expression, but were simultaneously attuned to the ways in which madness was enmeshed in complex and often repressive social and institutional contexts.

Before the War Carl Einstein (the theorist of primitivism who I will discuss in the next section) wrote a story revolving around a visitor to an asylum who is forced to remain as an inmate.²⁴⁰ The institution itself, the story implies, produced those labelled mad; the story thus undermines the biological or bodily basis of madness, rendering medical or psychiatric authority as repressive and arbitrary. Friedrich Wagner’s poem ‘Asylum’ captures the institutional power of the asylum, beginning: ‘[w]e’re going into the asylum – We’re going out of the world’.²⁴¹ The asylum is a world unto itself, but not in Prinzhorn’s sense. For Wagner, it is not the autistic condition that produces terror, but incarceration itself:

In the evening the sick begin to scream.
Smashing the beds.
Tearing apart
With burning
Hands the chains.
And vomit
Their blood into the dark,
Where guards’ eyes glitter poisonously.²⁴²

239 Lenz 1921, p. 128.

240 Einstein 1913.

241 Wagner 1919b, p. 12.

242 Wagner 1919a, p. 13.

It is the final line here that turns this from an evocation of the terrible power of madness to an incipient institutional critique. When coupled with the malevolent surveillance of the guards, the chains appear as more than metaphorical, suggesting instead an external repression producing the violent response.

Wagner's poetry was one example of a critical approach that, to a greater or lesser extent, challenged the broader modernist appropriation of experiences of madness as a marker of creative energy. Achieving this kind of critical distance was difficult. Even Ernst Toller, whose subtle analyses of the logic of degeneration were so carefully attuned to its social dimensions, had a hard time holding on to these perspectives when his own situation was at issue. In his description of his incarceration in Kraepelin's asylum, he differentiated clearly his political institutionalisation from that of the 'truly' insane, describing their behaviour and appearance with a mix of horror, bemusement, and pity.²⁴³

Others were more willing to explore the instabilities and mutual implications of the categories of sanity and insanity. Conrad Felixmüller developed a subtle reading of the psychological impact of war and practices of institutionalisation that challenged the medicalisation of cognitive differences. Felixmüller had been influenced by Expressionism, speaking as late as 1919, in a tribute to the artist Schmidt-Rottluff, of 'the living man . . . the intensity of his body and spirit in freedom'.²⁴⁴ Like so many others, he was radicalised by war, his aesthetic and political trajectory shaped in part by his work in a psychiatric institution, in his case as an orderly performing part of his military service during 1917 in the Arnsdorf asylum in Sachsen. This experience inspired a brief written account and a lithograph, the former published in the journal *Menschen* in May 1918. Where so many Expressionists used madness as a metaphor for this creative spirit of freedom, Felixmüller foregrounded institutional practices above abstract ideas of transcendent humanity. He linked the asylum to other forms of institutional oppression, calling in a 1918 article for the 'abolition of the death-penalty, factories, and asylums'.²⁴⁵

Felixmüller's 'Military Hospital Orderly Felixmüller XI, Arnsdorf' gives a destabilising, swirling, hallucinatory account of his travel on a Red Cross train and subsequent work in a hospital. Unlike Prinzhorn, however, Felixmüller refuses the distance his position as orderly allows, identifying with the condition of the patients for whom he was caring. 'In twenty beds around me sick soldiers are laid out. Sick in mind, epileptics, madmen, cripples [*Gelähmte*],

243 Toller 1928.

244 Felixmüller 1919, p. 11.

245 Felixmüller 1918a, n.p.

wounded. All men like me . . . and I make every effort with this body to serve other like bodies, sick, wounded, insane'.²⁴⁶ The power of Felixmüller's account derives from this radical dissolution of the differentiations through which individual bodies were constituted. Rather than an anxious attempt to reground a coherent male body and subjectivity *against* the destabilising impact of war (an approach we saw with Dix), or a retreat into an abstract notion of madness (as with Prinzhorn), Felixmüller developed an identification with the patients as comrades. This approach has its own risks in terms of the appropriation of their experience and the erasure of the particularity of their condition, a danger especially evident as he dreams of sympathetically euthanising the 20 wounded men. Unlike eugenic euthanasia, however, this dream is more expressive of the desire for escape from war, an impossible flight from the horrific conditions of the hospital.

Felixmüller's lithograph *Soldier in an Insane Asylum* (Ill. 19), also from 1918, suggests even more strongly the extent to which he sought to undercut the dichotomies of health and illness, sanity and insanity, that grounded eugenic practices. Expressionist techniques of fragmentation are deployed in the image reproduced here, as well as in a second work he produced with the same title, to suggest the destabilising power of madness. It is not just the psychological state of the central figure that is fragmented, though, but also the walls of the prison-like asylum. Insanity is thus located in the institution as much as the individual, a destabilisation of boundaries evident with the central figure as well. He bears a letter reading 'Sender: Felixmüller', thereby placing the artist himself in the asylum, but in what way remains ambivalent: is the person clutching the letter a patient who has received it from Felixmüller, or is it Felixmüller himself?²⁴⁷

The beginnings of Felixmüller's shift away from more abstract Expressionist themes of unity and overcoming are evident in the central role he gives to war and capitalism in ending 'Military Hospital Orderly Felixmüller'.

Everyone would immediately become healthy and happy if one said to them: 'War is over' said to them: 'we delivered you from it through us – because we knew and recognized that thou and thou art our fellow man, hast consumed our guilt for us, art raving and insane'. If one were to say to them: 'We love you, fellow creatures, – and put an end to it'.

²⁴⁶ Felixmüller 1918b. For translations here and below, I have drawn in whole or in part on the excerpts from the article translated as 'Military Hospital Orderly Felixmüller', in Long 1993, here p. 169.

²⁴⁷ Hume 2003, pp. 81–83 makes this point.



ILLUSTRATION 19 *Conrad Felixmüller, Soldat im Irrenhaus 2 (Soldier in a Madhouse, 2), 1918, lithograph on wove paper, 34.1 × 27.9 cm.*

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Warm the walls of ice-cold hearts with love! Burst the obstinate egoism of capitalist liars for these men here in this sink of iniquity that is Europe.

No man is your enemy – in an insane bloody stump thou shouldst still recognize thy fellow man, thou thyself – because thou art the insane one, the raving mad one, the raging one, the *murderer* in the war!²⁴⁸

The bodily and the psychological are directly linked here, but unlike with dominant medicalised notions of degeneration these connections are not intrinsic or individualised; they are the product of the violence of war and capitalism. Indeed, it is the 'insane bloody stump' itself that joins us to one another, with the reader implicated in the last line as a guilty party. Despite the pull of the Expressionist desire for transcendence, the interpellation of the reader as murderer disrupts any simple humanist resolution.

Felixmüller's critique of militarism and his growing anti-capitalist politics emerged in part out of his experiences with the asylum. He became increasingly active in radical circles over the course of 1919, and began to produce images of revolutionary figures, including Luxemburg and Liebknecht. Felixmüller also increasingly turned to workers as subjects although, as Heinz Spielmann argues, his affirmative depictions not only put him at odds with his erstwhile protégé Otto Dix, but also reflected a certain shallowness in his political analysis – this despite being one of the relatively rare artists of working-class background.²⁴⁹ He joined the KPD, although he rejected what he saw as the dirigiste politics of a Karl Radek, whom he depicted in the 1920 *Karl Radeks Traum* (*Radeks Ehrgeiz*) as a puppet-master pulling the strings. Instead he turned to Otto Rühle, the dissident Dresden communist who was instrumental in founding the KAPD.²⁵⁰ Felixmüller considered his portrait of Rühle to be 'the only real picture from the German revolution'.²⁵¹ His revolutionary art, which he celebrated in a quasi-autobiographical piece called 'Der Prolet' in *Die Aktion* in June 1920, retained a utopian and rather abstract impulse, calling for the subordination of the artist to the proletariat and the formation of

²⁴⁸ Felixmüller, 'Military Hospital Orderly Felixmüller' in Long 1993, p. 170.

²⁴⁹ Spielmann 1996, p. 24.

²⁵⁰ Weinstein 1990, pp. 236–42. Rühle was the husband of Alice Rühle-Gerstel, who we encountered earlier through her writings on prostitution.

²⁵¹ Quoted in Spielmann 1996, p. 26.

an 'art of love, of human relationships',²⁵² a position familiar to us from the Munich revolutions. Felixmüller's politics never developed beyond this point; he turned away from political engagements as the revolutionary upsurge of the post-War years receded.

The foregrounding of the institutional politics of madness in the work of Felixmüller or Wagner was significant, but was focused exclusively on male inmates. In this sense they shared with Prinzhorn, Dix, and others a sense of madness as a crisis of masculinity, albeit one read through this institutional context. In the case of Felixmüller and Dix this focus had some justification in that they were concerned primarily with veterans, but Prinzhorn's work looked only at those institutionalised before 1914. His approach was especially skewed when we note that asylum populations in Germany prior to the War were disproportionately female. While precise statistics are difficult to come by, this was particularly the case with diagnoses of schizophrenia. In their study of the Wittenauer Heilstätten, an asylum in Berlin, for instance, Andrea Dörries and Thomas Beddies found that only 35 percent of those diagnosed as schizophrenic were men.²⁵³ Prinzhorn's exclusive interest in male inmates was not only troubling in that it lacked comprehensiveness; it also meant that he had little to say about the ways in which gender might serve as an interpretive framework for the inmates' work. Yet, as Bettina Brand-Claussen argues, the recurrence of themes like world domination in the artistic production of the male inmates provides a clear instance where their creations reflected particularly masculinist themes that would require a gendered social critique to understand.²⁵⁴

The dual sense of madness as crisis and as source of creative energy were thus both heavily masculinised in Weimar culture. However, there were rare alternatives that did emerge, and that present us with a rather different reading of the politics of madness. The painter Elfriede Lohse-Wächtler offers one of the most powerful expressions of a very different gendered perspective. Like some of the other artists we have looked at, she had a direct experience with the asylum. Lohse-Wächtler was institutionalised in 1929 and then again

252 Felixmüller 1920, p. 336. The piece tells the story of Pönnecke, like Felixmüller an artist of working-class background who is swept up in the world of bourgeois art, only to return to the proletariat through his experiences of war, the repression of the prison and the asylum, and the experience of revolution.

253 Dörries and Beddies 2003, p. 162.

254 Brand-Claussen 2001; Brand-Claussen 1996, p. 12.

in 1932, producing a significant body of work from within the institution.²⁵⁵ Like many of the inmates in Prinzhorn's collection, she was diagnosed as a possible schizophrenic,²⁵⁶ a pathology identified more broadly as 'degeneracy' in 1933,²⁵⁷ but her images were very different from the male artists that Prinzhorn examined. In part this was because she was a trained artist, having worked in Dresden where she met Dix and Felixmüller, but more importantly because of the rather different perspective that she brought to her representation of madness, the institution, and the creative process. Her work from the post-1929 period detailed the daily life of the asylum, foregrounding the impact of her institutionalised condition. As is evident in her 1931 *The Attack* (*Der Anfall*), she read this institutionalisation in terms of a gendered repression (Ill. 20). Like Prinzhorn's male subjects, Lohse-Wächtler produced visions of overwhelming (and often highly sexualised) male power and violence, but where the former identified with these figures, she portrayed them as external and dominating forces against which she struggled. Thus, in *The Attack*, psychiatric disturbance and institutionalisation are represented in part as a violent male assault. This depiction of male violence against women can also be read as a critique of her avant-garde colleagues and their fascination with such violence, a tendency with which Lohse-Wächtler was undoubtedly familiar. If, as we saw earlier, male artists sought to ward off the crisis of masculine subjectivity through the assertion of a sexualised and misogynist violence, Lohse-Wächtler depicts the crisis of feminine subjectivity as a struggle *against* that violence.

The contrast with Dix is strengthened if we consider Lohse-Wächtler's depiction of sex workers, which had much in common with Overbeck. As Carolin Quermann notes, Lohse-Wächtler produced numerous works set in brothels, but rather than portraying the workers in terms of their excessive and degenerate bodies, her work engaged with them as subjects, an approach that irritated critics.²⁵⁸ Her depictions of the asylum were thus part of her development of an alternative gendered aesthetics centred on women's subjectivity that, as we can see with *The Attack*, was embodied in complex ways. Her contours and musculature are distorted, but the muscles are simultaneously

255 The second time she was institutionalised it was in part through the intervention of Wilhelm Weygandt, the psychiatrist who we encountered earlier denouncing the degeneracy of Expressionism (see Brand-Claussen and Röske 2008, p. 74).

256 The hospital report read: 'Schizophrenia? Transitory Psychosis of an Unstable Person?' (quoted in Quermann 2006, p. 68).

257 Brand-Claussen and Röske 2008, p. 87.

258 Quermann 2006, pp. 70–71.



ILLUSTRATION 20 *Elfriede Lohse-Wächtler, Der Anfall (The Attack), 1931, black ink with colour overlay, 49 × 39 cm.*

strong, her posture upright and resistant to the attack. If we think of the image in terms of psychiatric politics, a further nuance is also possible. The twinned figures that the heroic woman is resisting present a complex reading of the politics of madness. The demonic figure looming over the scene clearly stands for psychic disturbance, a threatening presence. However, the male attacker is much more human and his violence immediate. He is thus less metaphorical, arguably representing the material coercive practices of the institution, the poisonous eyes of the guards that we saw in Wagner's poem. The scene is held together by the blood-red band running through the background, the only colour in the work.

The twinned figures attacking the woman thus suggest a complex interplay between psychic states and institutional or social practices, an awareness on the part of Lohse-Wächtler of the inherently coercive and ultimately misogynist practices of psychiatric confinement in the period. Indeed, it was precisely this institutional violence that claimed Lohse-Wächtler's life. She spent most of the last decade of her life incarcerated, was forcibly sterilised in 1935, and was subsequently murdered at Pirna-Sonnenstein in 1940, gassed as part of the Nazi eugenics project.²⁵⁹ While *The Attack* presents a powerful image of resistance to practices of confinement and violence, it also resists the easy avant-garde identification of madness with freedom and creativity. Instead, freedom is the product of struggle against psychological trauma, and against institutional constraints and the social constitution of madness. In this respect, *The Attack* is rather different from many of the works that we have seen in this chapter. It seeks to reclaim a subject position from within the asylum and the diagnosis of 'madness'. Rather than appropriating this subject position as a marker of creative expression, however, it seeks to undo the discursive and material practices that surround 'madness', producing in the process a much more profoundly emancipatory and socially grounded critique.

4.6 Primitivism, the Body, and Colonial Nostalgia

This chapter has argued that the Weimar avant-garde was built upon a search for primal forms of creative expression that led it through a complex and often contradictory engagement with the body. This search, driven by the desire to overcome the fragmenting and alienating state of capitalist modernity, produced images of the body with complex and often contradictory relationships with material practices of embodiment. The incommensurability of these two

259 Quermann 2006, pp. 70–71; Augat 2003, pp. 29–31; Brand-Claussen and Röske 2008, pp. 74–76.

bodies, the representational and the material, was a constant source of creative tension, often productive, but also often repressive and disabling. The desire for emancipatory forms of pure creative expression was all too often grounded in nostalgic dreams of bodily and aesthetic wholeness that effaced the concrete social relations of embodiment articulated especially in relation to capitalist labour and repressive practices of degeneration, eugenics, and social hygiene.

The desire to find an extra-social and trans-historical creative source found its purest form in the primitive, which purportedly lay 'outside' or prior to civilisation. Primitivism was grounded in a sense of a radical spatial and temporal alterity, and sustained the avant-garde project throughout the Weimar period. It underlay the many other searches for forms of pure creative expression, a connection evident in Prinzhorn's aesthetic theory. In relation to the work of one of the inmates he discussed in detail, Karl Brendel, Prinzhorn said, 'we are touched by a breath of that simplicity which stills us whenever we meet it, whether in the eyes of an animal, a child, or in the works of primitives and earlier cultures; it is more common to the East than to Europe', although it can also be found in the work of Franz Marc and other modernist artists.²⁶⁰

These parallels between different forms of creative expression were commonplace, but what is key is that, unlike the 'true' primitive, none are entirely untouched by 'civilisation'. In the case of Brendel, as his art developed his work lost its unmediated primitivity; his later work 'we can compare . . . only to works from great cultures'.²⁶¹ The artistry of the mentally ill may have primitive qualities generated by the autism and institutional separation of its practitioners, but it is only in a pristine, natural isolation that truly primitive art emerges.²⁶² Here Prinzhorn echoed *Totem and Taboo*, in which Freud, writing in 1913, contended that while neurotics expressed a primitive impulse, their actions were not as uninhibited as a true primitive state in which 'thought passes directly into action'.²⁶³ As with his fetishisation of the 'autistic' character of asylum art that, as we have seen, had as much to do with institutional politics as with any inherent creative process, Prinzhorn also has to work hard to create the context for a 'pure' primitive state. Thus, he displays a number of drawings of animals by an unnamed Nigerian woman that, he says, echo the artistry of the mentally ill. Here too he ignores their social context – they in fact were

260 Prinzhorn 1972, p. 108.

261 Prinzhorn 1972, p. 111.

262 Prinzhorn 1972, pp. 250–55.

263 Freud 1950, p. 161.

not 'spontaneous', but came from the notebook of an anthropologist who had asked her to demonstrate her technique.²⁶⁴

The primitivist project as a whole, I will argue, was fundamentally based on this kind of repression. Indeed, by definition the primitive was constituted by a lack of social mediation, existing in a pure state of nature. At the same time, the search for a radical alterity was by no means restricted to aesthetic practice. As I have discussed at length in this and the previous chapter, a transformative aesthetics was often tied directly to a social critique. Thus, in Expressionism the primitive also stood in contrast to the alienating and repressive nature of modern life. Primitive immediacy, especially as captured in pure creative expression, thus offered a regenerative antidote. Where defenders of 'civilisation' spurned the primitive as a degenerate Other, in primitivism this radical alterity was precisely the source of its power.

This turn to the primitive was ideologically and culturally heterogeneous, and ran through many different fields. Primitivism informed art, cultural criticism, forms of mass culture, and various counter-cultural movements. In all of these fields, primitivist tendencies ostensibly celebrated or defended the culture of non-European and non-white peoples. But, I will argue, these approaches were inextricable from imperial and colonial logics and histories, connections that were especially evident in the ways in which they drew on anthropological conceptions of the primitive. The rest of this chapter will look at the interconnected histories of primitivism, colonialism, and culture. This approach also opens up the intersections of primitivism with the two major themes of this book. First, beginning already before the War, the colonial question had taken on a significant place in debates on the left, especially in theories of imperialism, and in shaping the left's position in relation to other political forces. Thus, ideas of cultural and political radicalism again come together here. Second, colonialism and primitivism were deeply implicated in broader discourses of race and the politics of the *Volkskörper*. In this sense, primitivism needs to be understood in conjunction with the complex politics of degeneration and social or racial hygiene. In this section, then, I will develop a critical analysis of Weimar primitivism that focuses carefully on these social and historical contexts.

Colonialism represented a particularly overdetermined locus of anxiety and debate in the Weimar period. Article 22 of the Treaty of Versailles had proclaimed Germany's unfitness as a colonial ruler, leading to the loss of the country's colonial possessions. As a result, colonial histories were deeply linked with the debates over the loss of the War, the myth of the stab-in-the-back, and the

264 Prinzhorn 1972, p. 252.

contestations over national identity and politics that I have looked at extensively in this and previous chapters. As Pascal Grosse argues, these colonial experiences were also central to the development of eugenics and the emergent racial sciences that came to occupy such prominence over the course of the Weimar period.²⁶⁵ As we shall see, anthropology was central in terms of providing connections between artistic primitivism, racial hygiene, and colonial practice. In a sense, anthropology can be characterised as the twin of sociology, both disciplines emerging in the late nineteenth century in response to the transformations of imperialist capitalism. If sociology, whose conceptualisations of the city and modern life I have explored through Simmel's work, was concerned with industrialising and urbanising Europe, anthropology's gaze was directed at the colonial lands whose exploitation was fuelling that development; together, the two disciplines constituted the globe as a field for knowledge production.²⁶⁶

The resources provided by anthropology in this respect were material as well as conceptual. Expressionist and other modernist and avant-garde artists drew heavily on the collections of art and artefacts extracted from the colonies by anthropologists, administrators, settlers, soldiers, and entrepreneurs.²⁶⁷ As this list of occupations suggests, anthropology in Germany needs to be understood broadly; its boundaries were fluid, incorporating academic practices that were only slowly being institutionalised, as well as the efforts of a wide range of what we might now call amateurs.²⁶⁸ This remained the case into the 1920s, although the first decades of the twentieth century did see a growing professionalisation of anthropology, in part through its integration with racial science, which read human difference through bodily markers and biologised categories.²⁶⁹

Because Germany no longer had a colonial empire, the Weimar period was characterised by what I will call 'colonial nostalgia'. As my discussion of nostalgia in the previous chapter would suggest, this nostalgia was both specific, looking back on Germany's colonial history, but was also driven by the broader

265 Grosse 2000.

266 On German anthropology, see Smith 1987; Zimmerman 2001; Penny and Bunzl 2003; Evans 2010. Anthropology was made up of three areas whose interconnections varied over time: physical anthropology (in German, the field designated as *Anthropologie*); ethnology (*Völkerkunde*); and ethnography. The first two were the dominant fields.

267 On Expressionism, see Lloyd 1991a.

268 Zimmerman 2001, pp. 45–47. The extra-academic nature of the discipline made groups like the *German Anthropological Society*, which encompassed these amateurs, especially important in shaping the discipline (pp. 123–34).

269 Evans 2010, pp. 189–221; Grosse 2000, pp. 176–92.

dynamics of capitalist and imperialist modernity. Germany's colonial past was somewhat different than that of its major European rivals, with direct colonial rule coming only after German unification in 1871, when Bismarck was convinced of the need for colonies in part by the protectionist sentiment generated by the depression of 1873–96, which in turn made the closed network of a colonial empire and its promise of economic self-sufficiency much more appealing.²⁷⁰ German colonialism thus lasted little more than 30 years. The colonial project quickly became central to the nationalist and right-wing pressure groups that we saw in the second chapter, with the Navy League, the Pan-German League, and others promoting imperialist policies. In 1887 the German Colonial Society (*Deutsche Kolonialgesellschaft*, or DKG) formed to promote colonialism as an integral component of national regeneration; as we shall see, it continued to agitate throughout the Weimar period.²⁷¹

Following on Bismarck's decision, Germany claimed territory in what was called Southwest (contemporary Namibia) and Southeast (Tanzania) Africa, Togo, Cameroon, parts of Samoa and New Guinea (the 'South Seas' colonies), and a relatively small outpost in China. Namibia was the most significant locus of settlement, with settler interests coexisting, sometimes uneasily, with extractive forms of colonial exploitation. For the settlers, and perhaps even more so for their supporters in Germany, settlement represented a response to the corruption of German space by modern forms of degeneration. Colonial space was imagined as empty and pure, thus offering the potential for national regeneration. This new national space was premised on the symbolic and material erasure of existing populations, thus introducing a genocidal potential into the heart of the colonial enterprise. German colonial ideology and practice placed far less emphasis than other colonial powers on 'uplifting the natives', a tendency that enabled an even greater racist brutality.²⁷²

These genocidal implications were actualised in the early twentieth century as resistance to German colonial practices grew, particularly in Southwest Africa among the Nama and Herero, the two main groups in the southern

270 Smith 1978, pp. 12–18.

271 Chickering 1984, pp. 29–40 discusses the DKG in the context of radical right movements. See also Pierard 1987, pp. 19–37.

272 Stoecker 1987. It was only in March 1914 that the Reichstag passed a resolution, after years of debate, that stated explicitly that Africans were to be 'protected', that exploitation should be minimised, and that education was important (see Smith 1978, p. 219). Missionary societies were an exception to this tendency, however (see Cohen 1993). As we shall see, despite this context, pro-colonial arguments stressed the relative 'benevolence' of German colonialism.

part of the colony. The events illustrated the close connections that existed between the politics of labour, the growth of racial and eugenic ideas, and the cultural imagination. The pastoral cattle raising practiced by the Herero in particular came into direct conflict with the ranching form of production practiced by the settlers, and the Herero were increasingly dispossessed of land and cattle.²⁷³ As the governor of the colony, Theodor Leutwein, had already stated prior to the Herero uprising in an argument that combined eugenic and economic elements, 'the colony's future depends on the gradual transfer of the land from the hands of the work-shy natives into those of the Europeans . . . In being exclusively concerned with the enlargement of their cattle herds, the Herero are becoming unproductive for our trade and industry'.²⁷⁴ The idea of 'work-shy natives' was a profound part of a racist colonial ideology but, as we have seen, also echoed domestic practices of social regulation around labour, social welfare, and disability politics.

Settler rapacity and paranoia gave rise in the 1904–8 period to resistance from the Herero and Nama, and then to a brutal German response under General Lothar von Trotha. Where Leutwein had promoted dispossession in part as a way of creating a Herero labour force detached from the land, Trotha had little time for these arguments, and Leutwein was eventually replaced as governor.²⁷⁵ The Herero had some success in their initial armed resistance, but subsequent German reinforcements quickly tipped the scales against them. The assault on the Herero was brutal and quickly escalated into systematic mass murder, the genocidal programme culminating when the German military drove the defeated Herero *en masse* into the Omaheke desert to die.²⁷⁶ Many of the remaining Herero were interned in concentration camps. This came after von Trotha issued his infamous extermination order in October 1904:

273 Emmett 1999, pp. 43–56; Gewald 2008, pp. 126–31; Werner 1993. On the conflict between Nama and German conceptions of property and land use and the German appropriation and privatisation of land and resources, see Hillebrecht 2008, pp. 145–47.

274 Quoted in Emmett 1999, pp. 51–52.

275 As the violence gathered pace, Leutwein argued against the genocidal arguments being promoted: 'Leaving aside the fact that a people numbering some 60–70,000 souls is not so easy to exterminate, I would regard such a measure as a serious economic error. We still need the Herero as small cattle-farmers and especially as labourers. The Herero nation must be finished off, but only in a political sense' (quoted in Gewald 2008, p. 133).

276 For a detailed description of the course of the fighting, see Hull 2005, pp. 5–90. Key accounts from the period include General Staff 1906 (the military's official history) and Schwabe 1907.

The Herero nation must leave the country. If it will not do so, I shall compel it by force. Inside German territory every Herero tribesman, armed or unarmed, with or without cattle, will be shot. No women and children will be allowed in the territory; they will be driven back to their people or fired on. These are the last words to the Herero nation from me, the great general of the mighty German emperor.²⁷⁷

By the end of the killing, fewer than 20,000 of the original 80,000 Herero were left alive, and less than half of the Nama.²⁷⁸ This was not the only time that German forces engaged in mass murder – the German suppression of the Maji Maji revolt in Southeast Africa, one of the most significant liberation uprisings in African colonial history, killed over 200,000 people – although the Nama and Herero genocides generated the greatest debate in Germany at the time.

The roots of these genocides were and remain much debated. Kurd Schwabe, an officer in the colonial army whose 1907 book provides one of the more detailed accounts of the War, echoed the dominant military and colonial reasoning: '[t]he Herero people, who have brought so much damage to our Protectorate, met their terrible yet deserved fate in the waterless desert sands'.²⁷⁹ Schwabe's account highlighted a series of rather typical justifications for colonial rule. The Herero, he contended, are '[m]istrustful, untruthful, and disloyal, thieving and – when they are in the majority – violent and cruel'.²⁸⁰

Isabel Hull argues that these racist justifications tell only part of the story, stressing instead the logic of German military culture. 'The pursuit of military victory, the pure victory of superior force, under conditions in which it was impossible to achieve ended in the mass death of noncombatants. That result was compatible with Trotha's racist views, but it actually evolved from standard military doctrines and practices'.²⁸¹ Hull argues that colonial wars thus drew on military practice developed in Germany between 1870 and the First World War. As we saw in the second chapter, ideas of total war were at the heart of planning for the latter conflict; it is this planning that was enacted in these

277 Quoted in SWAPO of Namibia 1981, p. 13. The mention of cattle here points to the centrality of ranching and landed interests in the development of the genocide, although at this point, as the passage suggests, control over cattle and land was no longer the only factor determining the shape of the assault.

278 Exact numbers, especially of the size of the original populations, are disputed and difficult to ascertain; the figures I use here are the most often cited (see Hull 2005, pp. 88–90). On the genocide, see Zimmerer and Zeller 2008.

279 Schwabe 1907, p. 305.

280 Schwabe 1907, p. 69.

281 Hull 2005, p. 53.

genocides. However, while Hull's argument is compelling, she tends to miss the extent to which 'standard military doctrines and practices' were themselves expressive of racialised ideas. As Karl Liebknecht argued in his classic work *Militarism and Anti-Militarism*, written in the immediate aftermath of the Nama and Herero genocide, militarism more broadly could not be divorced from imperialist competition, and hence racist colonial practices.²⁸² As Hull suggests, the institutional logic of the German military promoted an exterminationist policy, but it is not incidental that it was enacted on a racialised population.

These racialised conceptions were deeply rooted in the economic logic of colonialism as well, but that logic was contradictory. This was evident in Schwabe's stress on the apparent unwillingness of Africans to work according to German needs and norms. This formed part of his justification of genocide, but he also argued that 'they need a strong, guiding hand in order to make them useful members of human society'.²⁸³ In many respects, the economic needs of the colony required an exploitable labour force, a perspective put forward by those like Leutwein. Thus, racism played a dual structuring role, on the one hand rendering African bodies available for labour exploitation, on the other making them potential targets of genocidal violence. These tensions, I will suggest, were intimately linked with the competing cultural logics at play in imagining the colonial and the national projects.

Challenges to genocidal colonial policy came especially from the left in Germany, with Liebknecht particularly vocal. In 1906 the SPD voted against the extension of funding for the war, leading the government to call new elections. The 'Hottentot elections' (Hottentot being the pejorative name for the Nama)²⁸⁴ were about the genocide, but in fact ended up being framed more prominently by the left's purported 'treason' against the nation in refusing to fund military action. With the exception of the Catholic Centre Party, which opposed colonial violence on moral and religious grounds, most other political parties and groupings, from liberals to the nationalist right, lined up in support of German colonial rule and military action.²⁸⁵ The results of the election were inconclusive; the SPD lost relatively few votes, although they did lose

282 Liebknecht 1973.

283 Schwabe 1907, pp. 436–37.

284 Heyden 2008.

285 Grimmer-Solem 2007 stresses that it was liberal economists such as Gustav Schmoller and the *Kolonialpolitisches Aktionskomité* (Colonial-Political Action Committee) rather than right-wing nationalists who provided the key legitimisation for the colonial enterprise, bridging the often contentious divide between colonial business interests and the

a substantial number of seats. The election did thrust the colonial question closer to the centre of political debate, however, with the Colonial Office gaining full ministerial status in the aftermath and colonial development intensifying under its head, Bernhard von Dernburg.

The election was especially significant as it cemented the importance of colonialism in the nationalist imaginary and bound it much more tightly to racial and eugenic conceptions of the national body. Chancellor von Bülow highlighted these themes in a November 1906 speech in the Reichstag: '[t]he impulse to colonize for the expansion of one's own people is present in every *Volk* that enjoys a healthy growth and powerful life-energy. Since the beginnings of world history, the German people have been a colonizing people... and will remain a colonizing people as long as we have healthy marrow in our bones.'²⁸⁶ Kurd Schwabe took on accusations of racism from the SPD and Centre Party by turning them on their head. It was the Herero, he claimed, who harboured a 'furious hatred against the whites and their superior culture, therefore a racial hatred'.²⁸⁷ Those who blamed the settlers, he continued, had no sense of the Herero character or of the situation in the colony.

The impact of the 'Hottentot elections' on the left was substantial, with the ideas and political dynamic that emerged here carrying over to the Weimar period, impacting especially on the reorientation of the left. The SPD was by no means united in their opposition to colonialism in 1907, even if most questioned the scope of the violence to which the Herero and Nama were subjected. Divisions between revisionists and revolutionaries played a central role. Revisionist arguments drew on progressivist notions of development that meshed easily with colonial ideas. Thus, leading revisionists in the Party, including Bernstein and Noske, expressed support for the 'civilising' mission of colonialism.²⁸⁸ As one revisionist writer put it in 1907: 'as we have learned that in many areas there is a solidarity of interests between peasants and

settler colonialism endorsed by the nationalist right. Dernburg's reforms, he argues, were enabled by these scholars.

286 Quoted in Naranch 2000, p. 311.

287 Schwabe 1907, p. 70.

288 See especially Noske 1914 for the pro-colonial SPD position. On the connections between revisionism and pro-colonial sentiment in the SPD, see Fletcher 1983 and 1984, who looks especially at Joseph Bloch and the programme of the *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, the key organ for the propagation of revisionist views on imperialism. These views were not always tolerated by the party, with Gerhard Hildenbrand, for example, a contributor to the *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, expelled from the party for his pro-colonial views (Wette 1987, p. 92). On the opposition to these pro-colonial tendencies from the left of the Party, see Stoecker and Sebald 1987.

industrial workers, so we must learn to understand that in some areas, for example in colonialism, there is a solidarity of interest between the bourgeois and the proletarian'.²⁸⁹ The Party voted to reject some of Noske's more extreme statements of support for the War, which Karl Liebknecht condemned as producing 'a kind of jingoistic atmosphere [*Hurrastimmung*]',²⁹⁰ but the loss of seats in 1907 served to strengthen the revisionist position.²⁹¹

In the longer term, the accusations of treason levelled at the SPD at that time played a significant role in prompting the later fateful decision of the Party to vote with the government at the outbreak of the First World War. Rosa Luxemburg stressed the connection between the two events in her 'Junius Pamphlet' of 1915. The 'Hottentot elections', she argued, 'with their spiritual pogrom atmosphere, were a prelude to the Germany of August 4 [1914]' when the entire SPD caucus voted in favour of authorising war credits.²⁹² Like Liebknecht, Luxemburg had long stressed the links between imperialism, racism, and the growing influence of revisionism in the party. Already before the war in 'Peace Utopias', for example, she had criticised Kautsky and others for supporting a 'United States of Europe': '[e]very time that bourgeois politicians have championed the idea of Europeanism, of the union of European states, it has been with an open or concealed point directed against the "yellow peril", the "dark continent", against the "inferior races", in short, it has always been an imperialist abortion'.²⁹³

Luxemburg's political critique was grounded in her theorisation, most notably in *The Accumulation of Capital* (1913), of the imperialist nature of capitalist accumulation. The book dealt with the problem of the expanded reproduction of capital. Luxemburg argued that Marxist theory had often lost sight of the material and historical conditions under which capitalism had unfolded, thereby missing the necessity and centrality of imperialism to that

289 Quoted in El Tayeb 2005, p. 40.

290 Liebknecht 1969, p. 16.

291 See Wette 1987, pp. 84–100 for a discussion of the shifts in the SPD's position on the colonial question, and Noske's role in that shift. He argues that in the 1907–8 period Noske had less of an influence than is often assumed (p. 90), although after this time he became the Party's key spokesperson on colonial issues.

292 'The Junius Pamphlet: The Crisis in the German Social Democracy' in Luxemburg 1970, p. 285.

293 'Peace Utopias' in Luxemburg 1970, p. 256. Kautsky and the SPD continued to promote this idea during the Weimar period, the Party conference at Heidelberg in 1925, for example, committing the Party to 'the creation, on urgent economic grounds, of European economic unity, and to the formation of the United States of Europe' (quoted in Potthoff and Miller 2006, p. 113).

development. She contended that neither classical political economy nor Marx managed to account for the ability of capitalism to overcome the problem of realisation, the ability of capitalist consumption to sustain rising production: '[t]he realization of the surplus value for the purposes of accumulation is an impossible task for a society which consists solely of workers and capitalists'.²⁹⁴ Given this structural impossibility, capital requires a non-capitalist 'outside' to sustain its expansion: 'the deep and fundamental antagonism between the capacity to consume and the capacity to produce in a capitalist society, a conflict resulting from the very accumulation of capital which periodically bursts out in crises and spurs capital on to a continual extension of the market'.²⁹⁵ The 'outside' required as the solution to the problem of realisation could lie within capitalist regions, areas of society not yet incorporated into the sphere of capital. Primarily, though, the 'outside' lay outside the core capitalist nations in Europe, in areas being prised open through imperial and colonial expansion.²⁹⁶

Luxemburg's argument implied a powerful alternative conception of imperialism to that of the revisionists. Where revisionists critiqued the excesses of colonial practice while endorsing the racist civilisational justification of colonial rule, Luxemburg argued that imperialism was the necessary form taken by capitalist accumulation and hence replicated its exploitative practices in magnified form. Despite these fundamental differences, however, her account of capitalist accumulation could not entirely shake off the dichotomous structure of colonial thought. In contrasting simple and expanding reproduction, she argued that the latter 'had been the rule since time immemorial in every form of society that displayed economic and cultural progress . . . No important forward step in production, no memorial of civilisation . . . would have been possible without expanding reproduction'.²⁹⁷ This was the case under capitalist accumulation, but also with the great waterworks of the East, the pyramids, and Roman military roads. Fundamentally different are the small handicraft units of India and China which involve simple reproduction: 'simple reproduction is in all these cases the source and unmistakable sign of a general economic and cultural stagnation'.²⁹⁸

294 Luxemburg 1951, p. 350.

295 Luxemburg 1951, p. 347.

296 At times she tends to buy into climatological and geographical theories of race even while critiquing colonial exploitation, arguing for example that 'Capital needs other races to exploit territories where the white man cannot work' (Luxemburg 1951, p. 362).

297 Luxemburg 1951, p. 41.

298 Ibid.

This juxtaposition of dynamic and stagnant forms of reproduction introduced a progressivist conception into Luxemburg's understanding of imperialist capitalism, albeit one very different from revisionist progressivism. As a result, as critics have pointed out, Luxemburg's theorisation of capitalist accumulation saw imperialism as both necessary for capitalist expansion and the sharpening of class struggle, and also that against which the struggle must be waged.²⁹⁹ Yet there is little room in Luxemburg's analysis for the agency or struggle of those subjected to imperialist and colonial practices, especially those 'outside' capitalism in economic settings she considers stagnant. Luxemburg makes this explicit in 'The Crisis in German Social Democracy', wherein she argues that

[o]nly from Europe, only from the oldest capitalist nations, when the hour is ripe, can the signal come for the social revolution that will free the nations. Only the English, the French, the Belgian, the German, the Russian, the Italian workers together can lead the army of the exploited and oppressed. And when the time comes they alone can call capitalism to account for centuries of crime committed against primitive peoples; they alone can avenge its work of destruction over a whole world.³⁰⁰

Luxemburg's latent progressivism comes out most strongly at this point, when she suggests that the fulfilment of the imperialist project will bring the crises of capitalism to a final breaking point: '[a]t a certain stage of development there will be no other way out than the application of socialist principles'.³⁰¹ In 1929 Henryk Grossman rejected Luxemburg's argument and its political implications, which, despite its emphasis on struggle, included the danger of passivity.

299 Brewer 1980, pp. 63–69 argues that while imperialism was historically central to capitalism, Luxemburg was mistaken in reading this as necessary to capitalist logic. Bellofiore 2009, pp. 3–4 likewise points to Luxemburg's mistaken critique of *Capital* Volume II from the perspective of the actuality of capitalist accumulation; Bellofiore's subsequent defence of much of her argument, however, engages relatively little with the concrete questions of imperialism and colonialism.

300 Luxemburg, 'The Junius Pamphlet: The Crisis in German Social Democracy', in Luxemburg 1970, p. 327. Imperialist war, she argued, decimated the ranks of this European proletariat. She offered a rather troubling echo of eugenic fears over the War's impact on national fitness here, seemingly endorsing ideas of contra-selection, although without the biological reductionism of most conceptions of the *Volkskörper*. A great danger is that the War 'is reducing the labouring population in all of the leading nations to the aged, the women and the maimed' (p. 327).

301 Luxemburg 1951, p. 467.

'Her deduction of the necessary downfall of capitalism is not rooted in the immanent laws of the accumulation process, but in the transcendental fact of an absence of non-capitalist markets... Luxemburg thus renders the theory of breakdown vulnerable to the charge of a quietist fatalism in which there is no room for the class struggle'.³⁰² Grossman's analysis identifies a dichotomy between Luxemburg's conception of socialist organising – which stressed the importance of spontaneous action – and the potentially fatalistic orientation of her political economy. The danger of this latter approach is magnified if we apply Luxemburg's account not just to an understanding of imperialism as a stage of capitalism's historical development, but to the concrete historical practices of colonialism. If it is only the working classes of the advanced capitalist nations that can lead the struggle, the resistance of the Herero and others falls outside the scope of political or theoretical consideration. The 'outside' to capitalism thus retains its primitive character.

Despite its overt anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist framework, then, Luxemburg's critical political economy smuggles back in the spatialised conceptions of primitivism that underlay the colonial appropriations of land, in particular the extent to which ideas of property were based on 'productive' use (i.e., insofar as they are not 'stagnant'). This long-standing justification for colonial appropriation – dating back at least to John Locke's *Two Treatises on Government*, in which he argued property was based on the exploitation of land – was captured in a notorious passage from Gustav Frenssen's massive best-seller *Peter Moor's Journey to the South-West* (*Peter Moors Fahrt nach Südwest*) describing the Herero genocide: 'these blacks deserved to die, before God and mankind, not because they murdered the two hundred farmers and rose against us, but because they built no houses and dug no springs'.³⁰³ Primitive space, in this case African, was configured as empty space because it remained stagnant and undeveloped, the contrast between the nomadic pastoral form of cattle production practiced by the Herero and the ranching form that characterised German settlers elevated into an existential difference between

302 Grossman 1992, p. 42. See also Kuhn 1995; Mattick 2009. Mattick argues that the differences between Luxemburg's and Grossman's positions were less pronounced than many have argued.

303 Quoted in Brehl 2008, p. 106. Sixty-three thousand copies of the novel were printed in its first year of publication, and it went on to become an enduring best-seller, reaching half a million copies by 1945, and was translated into various languages (p. 104). See also Noyes 1998.

primitive and civilised.³⁰⁴ While Luxemburg condemned the violently repressive nature of that relationship, her argument retains a sense of this dichotomy between productive capital and an unproductive or stagnant 'outside'.

Novels like Frenssen's were crucial in the elaboration of German colonial practices. The production of colonial space, to adapt a term from Henri Lefebvre, involved a profound reimagining of social and spatial relations.³⁰⁵ As John Noyes argues in relation to colonial literature, we need to understand cultural production in this context as a material practice of the production of empty and boundless colonial space.³⁰⁶ These cultural practices arguably became more important, but also shifted in significance, in the aftermath of the War. The War ended the formal German colonial project, which the Treaty of Versailles made official. Germany retained a limited role in imperialist networks of trade and finance, but the loss of a direct colonial empire was of major significance for the development of Weimar culture and politics.³⁰⁷

Especially significant in this respect was the growth of a sense of colonial nostalgia that shaped the culture and politics of the period in complex ways. This nostalgia was related to the deeply felt sense of injustice generated by the Treaty of Versailles, particularly its symbolic statute of 'war guilt' that held Germany responsible for starting the War. This claim of guilt legitimised in

304 This vision of the land did not come easily, however. As Birthe Kundrus argues, many settlers and colonial officials reacted with some dismay to the landscape of Southwest Africa in particular, the desert conditions not corresponding at all to their expectations of tropical lushness. It thus took some work for them to convert this initial disappointment into a sense of the land as a space of freedom on which colonial mastery could be written (2003, pp. 145–49).

305 Lefebvre's argument is especially pertinent here in that he warns against abstracting discursive conceptions of space from their material underpinnings, contending that 'without such a knowledge, we are bound to transfer onto the level of discourse, of language *per se* – i.e. the level of mental space – a large portion of the attributes and "properties" of what is actually social space' (1991, p. 7). It is in this sense that I have foregrounded conceptions of property before turning to questions of representation.

306 Noyes 1992, pp. 163–95. See also Zantop (1997) for a pre-history of the 'colonial fantasies' that came to shape German colonial practices.

307 With some notable exceptions, it is only relatively recently that sustained scholarly attention has been given to the significance of German colonial history. This has something to do with the short duration of German direct colonial rule, but it also has roots in the unfortunate persistence of ideas of the 'positive' impact of German colonialism as well as the strong tendency for German identity to be configured in terms of 'blood'. Thus, for example, the state, media, and broader society in Germany have long had difficulty recognising Afro-Germans as 'German', enabling a broader externalisation and repression of the memories of colonial rule (see Campt 2004; El Tayeb 1999 and 2005).

turn the extensive reparations payments imposed on Germany, the demilitarisation of the country, and the continued occupation of parts of Germany.³⁰⁸ The treaty also extended the Allied claim of German guilt to colonial activities on the basis that German atrocities made them unsuitable for colonial rule. In 1918 the British had already published a 'Blue Book', intended to undermine German claims to colonial territories, based in part on interviews with survivors detailing the genocide and repression in Namibia.³⁰⁹ This outraged pro-colonial opinion in Germany, with the 'colonial guilt lie' (*Koloniale Schuldliüge*) taking its place beside the 'war guilt lie' (*Kriegs Schuldliüge*) in agitation against the Treaty of Versailles. Indeed, these activists argued, Germany had been an exemplary colonial ruler, providing economic and educational development to the colonies; the loyalty of 'their' natives (the 'loyal askari', African troops that fought with the German occupation in Southeast Africa, were especially prominent in these accounts) demonstrated German benevolence.³¹⁰ The German Colonial Office thus published a 'White Book' refuting the British publication and outlining British colonial atrocities.³¹¹

The strength of dominant imperialist sentiment was evident in the March 1920 Reichstag vote opposing the loss of colonies under Versailles; the count was 414 for, including the SPD, and only seven against.³¹² The notion that a

308 Alan Kramer 2000 argues that while historians have focused on the guilt for war, equally controversial were claims that the Germans were guilty of atrocities *during* the War, a theme that we saw in the second chapter around the occupation of Belgium, and that fits more closely with the debates over claims of German colonial atrocities. The right made both 'lies' central to their propaganda.

309 Silvester and Gewald 2003 (the book contains a reprint of the Blue Book). While the Blue Book certainly needs to be understood as selective and serving British interests in undermining German claims on former colonies, the claims it documents are corroborated by many other sources as well. It also provides a very important source for African voices on the genocide that have otherwise been erased from the historical record. Indeed, in the mid-1920s, with Namibia now under South African mandate, a systematic attempt was made to destroy all copies of the Blue Book in the name of racial solidarity amongst white settlers in Namibia, those of German and South African provenance (pp. xiii–xxxvii). See also Dederig 1993 for a refutation of scholarship that continues to deny the claims in the Blue Book and the idea that Germany perpetrated genocide in Namibia.

310 Schubert 2003, pp. 307–32. 'Askari' is an Arabic and Kiswahili term for soldier or police. The myth of 'loyalty' has stubbornly persisted in many accounts of the war in Southeast Africa. Michelle Moyd gives a valuable reconstruction of the complex motivations of the askari in fighting for, or in many cases abandoning, the German military. Colonial loyalty was not significant among them (Moyd 2011).

311 Silvester and Gewald 2003, pp. xix–xxiiv.

312 Friedrichsmeyer et al. 1998, p. 16.

true European nation was a colonial nation continued to inform debates, and was increasingly inflected by notions of social hygiene. Thus, Albert Hahl, a former colonial governor of New Guinea and an activist in the DKG, wrote in his brief 1924 history of colonialism that: '[t]he colonial movement arising in our Fatherland at the beginning of the 1880s was triggered by the ancient longing of our people to have overseas territories for the settlement of our surplus national energies [*Volkskräfte*] in our own possessions'.³¹³

A number of groups, most prominent among them the DKG, agitated for the return of German colonies on these grounds. Journals, magazines, calendars, and other mass publications propagated the colonial idea. Novels like *Peter Moor's Journey* remained popular, but a host of new books as well as films were also produced that were directly or indirectly concerned with colonial themes. Notably, the celebration of violence that had been a strong theme in literature of the colonial period was now much more muted.³¹⁴

Shaped in part by the growth of racial hygiene and the sharpening of scientific racism in the Weimar period, the perceived colonial injustice perpetrated against Germany was conceptualised especially strongly in racial terms. The last governor of Southeast Africa, Heinrich Schnee, for example, argued in 1924 against the 'colonial guilt lie' not simply on the grounds that the accusations were false, but that those who propagated it were undermining the shared interests of *white* Europe. Africa, he argues, is 'an indispensable accessory to Europe' because of the latter's need for raw material, and hence countries needed to maintain racial solidarity.³¹⁵

This theme of racial treason perpetrated by other Europeans and its implication that Germany was a beleaguered bastion of whiteness ran through the culture of the period, directed most strongly at the French. The most notorious instance came with the post-War panic that came to be known as the 'Black Horror on the Rhine' (*schwarze Schmach am Rhein*).³¹⁶ The 'Black Horror' or 'Black Shame' referred to the stationing of African soldiers in Germany after

313 Hahl 1924, p. 62.

314 Brehl 2007, pp. 135–38.

315 Schnee 1924, p. 10. See also Hahl 1924, whose work was part of the same publication series as Schnee's and who likewise castigated Britain and especially France for reneging on their commitments made at the 1885 Berlin Congress, arguing that by doing so they betrayed the European solidarity on which the maintenance of colonial authority was dependent (pp. 62–64).

316 'Schmach' is more literally translated as 'shame', but 'horror' is the more commonly used term in English discussions of these events, in part deriving from E.D. Morel's interventions that, as I will discuss below, were very influential in shaping the panic; I will thus retain this usage here.

the War. During the War, the French had deployed significant numbers of colonial troops, a practice that Schnee cites as one of the most egregious examples of their treason against racial solidarity.³¹⁷ Much had been made of this already in German propaganda during the War,³¹⁸ but racist outrage exploded in its aftermath. As many as half of the French occupation troops were African, the majority North African but also including up to 10,000 Black soldiers.³¹⁹ Initially there were only sporadic and unorganised reactions, but by 1920, particularly after the Kapp putsch, protests became more organised. Not surprisingly, right-wing groups such as the Pan-German League were at the forefront, but the SPD-led government played a role in fomenting protest as well, with Ebert later arguing that occupation policy 'constituted an infringement of the laws of European civilisation'.³²⁰ As was the case with many other issues of social and racial hygiene, conservative and liberal bourgeois women's groups were also prominent in mobilising opposition to the 'Black Horror'.

Themes of racial defence and racial treason dominated the protests. As one paper argued,

Only too late will [the French] realize that they have conjured up a catastrophe for the whole of Europe through the use of colored troops in the Rhineland. All hope rests on the remaining European states and America. Hopefully the feeling of solidarity among the white race will break out in time to effectively meet the rising African threat.³²¹

In an echo of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, a document written by Africans was allegedly found that plotted an African takeover of the world, proclaiming 'the day of the Negro is dawning'; a commentary in the DKG journal *Der Kolonialdeutsche* argued that it was French racial treason, including the stationing of colonial troops, that had made possible this African plot through the

317 Schnee 1924, pp. 7–9. He argues rather disingenuously that this is first of all a problem for the colonial troops themselves, who are exposed to a climate for which they are not meant. Here he reverses the acclimatisation problem – the debates over whether or not white settlers could thrive in tropical settings – that was central to colonial debates, in particular in medicine and eugenics (see Grosse 2000, pp. 53–95; Kundrus 2003, pp. 162–73).

318 Klotz 2005, pp. 138–39.

319 The French decision to station these troops was partly due to shortages of troops, but was also in part a deliberate provocation (Grosse 2000, p. 203).

320 Quoted in van Laak 2007, pp. 95–96.

321 Quoted in Campt 2004, p. 57.

'unholy shattering of the authority of the white race'.³²² Some of the protests involved spontaneous racist reactions, which included attacks in the streets on black Germans, but many were part of an orchestrated campaign to mobilise ideas of an international white solidarity as part of the fight against the Treaty of Versailles; swaying US opinion was seen as especially important, but was largely unsuccessful.³²³ Within Germany, supporters of the campaign could call on substantial resources in the press, the government, and the entertainment industry; responses even included the release of a film in 1921.³²⁴ Support also came from across the political spectrum. Indeed, arguably the most influential international intervention came from the Independent Labourite E.D. Morel in England, who supported Germany's opposition to the war guilt claim, and was especially outraged by the lack of racial solidarity demonstrated by French use of colonial troops.³²⁵

Within Germany only *Rote Fahne* and the newly forming KPD systematically rejected the campaign. In the Reichstag, it was left to the USPD deputy Luise Zietz to challenge the racist tenor of the attacks. Capitalism, she argued in 1920, was the source of the alleged 'backwardness' of Africans,³²⁶ not racialised difference. Those who whipped up fears of the 'Black Horror' while saying nothing about Freikorps violence against the left or of the German colonial legacy were profoundly hypocritical; colonialism itself was the source of racist violence, comprising nothing more than a 'history of atrocities and oppression of colored peoples by the Germans'.³²⁷

The campaign against the 'Black Horror' drew especially on fears over 'racial mixing' in which questions of gender and sexuality played prominent roles. Concerns over interracial relationships had already played a prominent role in debates over the Herero and Nama genocide in the Reichstag prior to the War. As Lora Wildenthal argues, these debates were shaped by competing claims: the desire to exclude Africans from property and citizenship, and male settlers' assertion of sexual rights over Africans. Thus, between 1905 and 1912 administrations in the various German colonies sought to ban mixed marriages as

322 Der Kolonialdeutsche 1925a, p. 92.

323 Koller 2001, pp. 201–313; Nelson 1970, pp. 611–22.

324 Nagl 2009, pp. 181–91. For some critics on the right, however, the film did not take a hard enough line in its presentation of the problem.

325 Reinders 1968. See also Morel 1924, an article republished in the anti-Versailles journal *Die Kriegsschuldfrage* to mark his death and demonstrate thanks for his support.

326 Koller 2001, pp. 285–88.

327 Quoted in Lester 1986, p. 115.

a way of maintaining racial purity,³²⁸ a position based in part on the assertion that marriage could only be entered into by a person of legal age who is neither insane nor 'retarded', a category that was expanded to include the racialised 'primitive'.³²⁹ Given the competing claim of white male sexual freedom, however, these bans were never legally codified and colonial administrative decrees were only partially enforced.³³⁰

As mentioned earlier, these colonial debates were central to the emergence of racial science in the early twentieth century. Eugen Fischer became one of the most prominent racial theorists in part due to his study of the so-called 'Rehobother Bastards'. These were descendents of white Boer men and black women who migrated to the town of Rehoboth in the late nineteenth century. Fischer's 1913 book on them, which remained influential throughout the Weimar period, detailed the existential threat of miscegenation.³³¹ Echoing the language of degeneration, he argued that:

If there is the *probability*, or even the mere *possibility* that bastard blood is damaging our race . . . *any absorption must be prevented*. I take this to be so absolutely obvious that I can consider any other point of view only as that of complete biological ignorance . . . [T]his is about the *survival* – I choose my words consciously – of our race; this has to be the main criterion; ethical and legal norms just have to be secondary to that.³³²

Fears over miscegenation were sharpened further, as Pascal Grosse argues, by the movement of colonial subjects to the metropole. Many were performers (musicians, dancers, or part of *Völkerschauen*, popular exhibitions displaying 'primitive' peoples), but despite their public prominence, their numbers remained tiny.³³³ The primitivist spectacles in which they played roles made their presence especially public, but this visibility extended to their private

328 Smith 1998; Aitken 2007, pp. 95–145; Wildenthal 1997, p. 267.

329 Smith 1998, pp. 117–18.

330 Wildenthal 1997. El Tayeb 2005 stresses the strength of ideas of racial purity over gendered ideologies, and also suggests the anti-miscegenation decrees were more influential than does Wildenthal (pp. 42–45).

331 Grosse 2000, pp. 184–92.

332 Quoted in El Tayeb 2005, p. 42.

333 Lars Amenda argues that the logic of the shows was extended to the public presence of all black people in Germany, rendering them as a spectacle for white Germans on the streets and other public spaces, in particular in port cities like Hamburg, the focus of his account (Amenda 2005).

lives as well. Denied access to citizenship, they were constantly monitored by the state in the name of sustaining racial purity.³³⁴

After the War, racial discourses became even more prominent. Fears over miscegenation echoed on, but were sharpened by the loss of colonies and the debates over the 'Black Horror'. In the Reichstag in May 1920, for example, the Foreign Minister Köster stressed the dangers of racial mixing (*Mulattisierung*) and the spread of STIs (*Syphilisierung*), which he argued were a result of the occupation, claiming

that the constant presence of 50,000 people of a foreign race, from the standpoint of the hygiene of the people [*volkshygienischen Standpunkte*], presents a great danger . . . for Europe. The constant violence, the murder of innocent citizens, the rape of women, girls and boys, the enormous growth in prostitution, the opening of numerous bordellos even in small towns, as well as the rapid spread of the most serious kinds of sexually transmitted diseases . . . [means] that the German national body [*der deutsche Volkskörper*] is meeting with a constant destruction on its western edges.³³⁵

Many of the themes that I have taken up here and in earlier chapters are evident in Köster's argument: the invocation of a European (read: white) identity in danger; the implication of French racial treason; the displacement of the perpetration of sexual violence onto colonised and racialised men; the association of the primitive with prostitution, and in turn with disease; the spatial construction of the nation and its destruction; and the unification of these themes through ideas of social hygiene and the *Volkskörper*.

Themes of sexual danger were stressed in responses to the occupation. The establishment of brothels by French occupation authorities – which were similar to those put in place by the German military during the War – played a prominent role in feeding the racist frenzy over miscegenation.³³⁶ Any sexual contact between black men and white women was read through the lens of rape and violence; children born of interracial relationships thus became an especially fraught locus of anxiety. The so-called 'Rhineland bastards', a term that echoed Fischer's 'Rehoboth bastards', were configured in popular and scientific writing as a threat to whiteness and German identity. As Tina Campt argues, while they were not the only group of black Germans in the period,

334 Grosse 2003, pp. 93–95.

335 Quoted in Koller 2001, p. 244.

336 Stubbs 2001, pp. 124–31.

their association with the occupation and the 'Black Horror' panic made them a particularly volatile symbol. This included being subject to calls for sterilisation, an extension of the eliminationist tendencies in eugenic thinking that, as we saw in relation to people with disabilities, grew in strength over the course of the Weimar period. Forced sterilisation of black Germans was ultimately implemented during the Nazi years.³³⁷

The 'Black Horror' and the broader fears over miscegenation revolved around ideas of sexual violence, especially the idea of the black rapist prominent in all white supremacist societies, which acted as a screen obscuring the endemic rape perpetrated by soldiers and colonists that characterised German colonial rule. This violence was rarely addressed even by critics of colonialism, but was instead transposed onto the colonised themselves.³³⁸ In the German case, fears over miscegenation became especially prominent in the decade before the War as more and more German women began to take part in colonial settlement. The DKG and other colonial groups, including their women's wings, strongly supported women's migration.³³⁹ Increasing numbers of women in the colonies had the effect of strengthening the panic over black male sexual violence, but also of arguments against relationships between colonial men and indigenous women.

These debates were elaborated on the cultural front. Pre-War colonial literature frequently included women as the heroes protecting national and white blood, their presence in the colonies guaranteeing the heterosexual domestic union so central to the national imaginary, preventing miscegenation, and blocking the purported Africanising (*Verkafferung*) of male German settlers.³⁴⁰ In colonial culture this entailed a dichotomous portrayal of the 'native' as either obedient and loyal or rapacious, a dichotomy that was intimately linked with the violent disciplining of black male labour. Sexual violence in this context was thus profoundly ambivalent, the locus of both fear and desire. Colonial literature presented colonial space as a complex and contradictory terrain of white male sexual freedom and transgression, of sexual danger and violence directed at white women, and of the reconstitution of the white patriarchal

337 Campt 2004, pp. 63–64.

338 Hull 2005, pp. 150–51. Noske was an exception in highlighting colonial sexual violence (1914, pp. 87–88), but even in calling for the reform of colonial rule, he warned in 1909 of the dangers of 'barbarisation' that would result from the 'mixing of the races' (quoted in Wette 1987, pp. 103, 106). After the War he spoke out against the 'Black Horror'.

339 Kundrus 2003, pp. 77–96; Wildenthal 2001.

340 Reagin 2001, pp. 76–85; O'Donnell 1999, pp. 31–54.

family under threat in the metropole. These themes continued to resonate in the popular culture of the Weimer period.

A particularly egregious example of the fraught nature of colonial sexuality comes in an otherwise unremarkable 1927 autobiographical novel by Karl Volquarts entitled *German-African* (*Deutsch-Afrikaner*). Volquarts endorses the sexual freedom colonial rule had granted to white men, describing the practice he and others had of taking African 'wives' in unsanctioned 'marriages'. His depictions of interracial relations are based on a casual assumption of the sexual availability of African women, including the elaboration of fantasies of sexual violence. In one scene, Volquarts describes how he comes upon 'Sylvia', an incredibly beautiful mixed-race girl (*Mischling*). She is unlike most such mixed-race people, he says, who are almost without exception 'repulsively ugly'.³⁴¹ Sylvia's mother eventually agrees to let him take her for a walk, upon which a madness descends. He seizes and kisses her 'like a madman [*Rasender*]. When I finally came to my senses, I saw that she was crying'.³⁴²

This scene glosses over the rape, reading it as a kind of madness. This was a common practice, with many colonial accounts diagnosing the excessive brutality of colonial men as the result of 'tropical fever' (*Tropenkoller*); this is clearly what Volquarts is referencing here. As Thomas Schwarz argues, 'tropical fever' was a common theme in both literary and scientific accounts of the late colonial period, a medical diagnosis linked to neurasthenia and other modern nervous disorders that, as we have seen, were at the centre of concerns over social hygiene. The development of diagnoses of shell shock also drew on 'tropical fever', with both framed as a male challenge of will. In the case of 'tropical fever', though, loss of will was more justifiable, serving as a justification for and displacement of male colonial violence. Where the myth of the black rapist situates violence in a racialised savagery, 'tropical fever' attributes white male violence and rape to this same savage 'tropical' influence. Indeed, it was sexual intercourse with 'natives' that was often identified as a purported cause of tropical fever; thus, increasing numbers of white women in the colonies was given as a reason for a decline in cases.³⁴³ To buttress the hygiene of the heterosexual white family, many doctors thus argued that only 'healthy' people who followed proper hygienic practices – refraining from drink, avoiding prostitutes, exercising – should be part of the colonial project.³⁴⁴ In a sense, tropical fever marked the point at which 'civilisation' broke down and

341 Volquarts 1927, p. 110.

342 Volquarts 1927, p. 113.

343 Schwarz 2002, pp. 90–93.

344 Kundrus 2003, pp. 170–73.

the 'primitive' took over; in a book like that of Volquarts, we can see that while this alleged breakdown and its accompanying violence may have been the site of social hygienic and eugenic anxiety, it was also the site of a profound desire and fascination. This is precisely the logic of primitivism.

Volquarts' book is unusual only in that his African 'madness' is shown to have an impact on the crying Sylvia, however limited and brief. Here miscegenation plays a profoundly ambivalent role. Sylvia appears as the exception to the danger of miscegenation, an embodiment of beauty where there should only be monstrosity and ugliness. In this sense she embodies the conflicted tendencies of colonial desire and violence. Indeed, her body already bears the marks of that violence, as Volquarts subsequently tells us; he later learns that she had been frequently abused, and that she had lost a hand, something she had concealed from him.³⁴⁵ Punishment by amputation was of course a common form of violence in colonial and slave societies. Despite this unusual recognition of violence, the novel has no anti-colonial message – the story of Sylvia simply ends, and indeed Volquarts later describes with satisfaction the annihilation of a village after two German settlers are killed.³⁴⁶ His rape of Sylvia remains entirely external to Volquarts, his tropical fever displacing the violence back onto an inscrutable Africa. The white male colonial subject, in other words, remains whole.

Invocations of 'tropical fever' remained common in the Weimar period. In popular colonial magazines, like *Köhler's Kolonial-Kalender*, this was taken up from scientific perspectives,³⁴⁷ but it was especially in adventure tales like Albert Krueger's 1931 story 'Tropical Fever' that it gained popularity. Krueger's tale is worth retelling as it offers a rather extraordinary use of fever as a marker of sexual transgression. Like Volquarts, Krueger recounts a story of sexual desire and transgression in which 'tropical fever' allows for the expression of taboo social relations. In this case, the colonial context (a hunting vacation in India) provides the enabling conditions for a tale of gender crossings and same-sex desire between Europeans. On vacation, Krueger meets a handsome young Scottish man, Fred Mac Ivor. They develop an intense and close relationship with strong homoerotic undertones. As the vacation sadly draws to a close they embark on a particularly dangerous tiger hunt. When a tiger finally appears, Krueger is seized by a feverish urge to attack the animal physically, dropping his gun and rushing barehanded towards it. He trips, chaotic scenes whirl about him, and he loses consciousness. When he finally awakes, his

345 Volquarts 1927, pp. 109–15.

346 Volquarts 1927, pp. 131–32, 136–38.

347 For example, see Kronecker 1927.

first thought is of Fred. The Maharajah with whom they are staying takes him to another room where his beloved friend lies dead, killed, we later learn, saving Krueger's life. Krueger is devastated, covering Fred's mouth with kisses. 'Fred', he says, 'my dear, good Fred, who I loved like a brother; no, still more like . . . like . . . yes, simply like Fred'.³⁴⁸

Here we have a somewhat different story of sexual freedom and transgression from that told by Volquarts. The relationship is between Europeans, and thus consensual and loving, if homoerotic. But the conclusion of the story offers a twist. As the Maharajah finishes telling Krueger about Fred's heroic act, he uses the feminine pronoun. Krueger is shocked, but then all becomes clear. Fred was 'really' a woman secretly dressed as a man, his transgression of gendered roles enabling Krueger's desire to be reinscribed retrospectively as heterosexual. The same-sex desire produced by his 'tropical fever' remains too dangerous for such a magazine. Nevertheless, the colonial context enables the loosening of social norms to the extent that this desire can speak its name, if only fleetingly. The story in fact holds open this possibility at the end. Krueger finishes with a brief memory of the beauty of Lona, Fred's 'real' name. Right before this, however, he recounts how he had subsequently remained single and alone, his thoughts often drifting back to his time in India, feeling 'as if I hear Fred's melancholic Scottish songs'.³⁴⁹ His memory of his love retains both names, both genders.

Both Krueger's and Volquarts' stories rely on the colonial project to sustain their visions of sexual transgression, but they are profoundly different. Volquarts' account reflected the more conventional colonial account, his rape of Sylvia endorsing both the white male sexual freedom made possible by colonial rule and the conditions of repression that enabled it, with only a trace of a bad conscience remaining. For Krueger, however, the colonial setting enables a much more emancipatory conception of human sexuality that highlights the extent to which, for many Europeans, the colonial moment enabled the imagination of a radical freedom inaccessible and unimaginable in the European context. The colonial genre allowed for the expression of a wide range of otherwise forbidden subjectivities and forms of life. Crucially, though, the freedoms on offer were accessible only to the European subjects of the story; the colonial landscape and colonised bodies were the objects through which the stories could be constructed. Indeed, Krueger's story appeared in *Köhler's Kolonial-Kalender*, an important vehicle for the propagation of colonial nostalgia in the later Weimar period replete with accounts of violence and conquest.

348 Krueger 1931, p. 122.

349 Krueger 1931, p. 123.

These themes ran through colonial popular cultures more broadly, a discussion that I will take up again in the next chapter. Here, though, I want to turn back to the development of primitivism in the aesthetic theory and artistic practice in the Weimar period. The contradictory impulses that we have seen in colonial culture and the colonial nostalgia of the post-War period were crucial in this respect. Themes of sexual and other forms of transgression that we saw in Volquarts or Krueger were common in primitivist art, as were the contradictory impulses of freedom and violence. Indeed, artists and critics themselves relied heavily on these forms of popular culture, as well as on the artefacts produced by the colonial project. Thus, the museums that fed the popular appetite for colonialism were, as I mentioned earlier, also where artists and critics accessed forms of cultural production from the colonies. Artists were also fascinated by media representations of 'primitive' peoples, avidly consuming newspapers, adventure stories, postcards, and other forms of colonial culture. Art and aesthetic theory no less than popular culture were part of the legacy of colonialism, a legacy especially evident in primitivism.

In what follows, I will look at some of the key theorists of primitivism in the Weimar period, suggesting connections with the various colonial themes and histories that I have outlined above. While primitivism certainly revalued the dominant understanding of the primitive as degenerate, its ascription of an ahistorical status to the primitive arguably made it constitutionally incapable of offering critical insight into its own historical conditions of possibility. How did the primitivist search for pure, originary, extra-historical forms of creative expression develop out of these colonial relations? The lines here are often indirect and contradictory, and in some cases we will also find that artists and critics *were* attentive to the historical conditions out of which primitivism emerged. In rare cases primitivism included a critical awareness of the unfreedom that enabled it; the work of Carl Einstein and Hannah Höch are examples of this critical approach that I will discuss in conclusion.

Primitivist ideas were rooted in broader conceptions of cultural difference that emerged out of philosophical and anthropological debates about human being and origins. The dominant framework for understanding this cultural difference in early twentieth-century Germany was the dichotomy between *Naturvölker* ('people of nature') and *Kulturvölker* ('people of culture'). In fact, as Andrew Zimmerman notes, in the German context this distinction was initially rather stronger than that entailed by the English term 'primitive'. German anthropology held that the *Naturvölker* existed entirely outside history; hence, he argues, anthropology produced an anti-humanist discourse that refused an overarching notion of universal human being. This approach came out of the German colonial experience, but was also shaped by the particular dynamics of

German urbanisation and modernisation.³⁵⁰ In colonial terms, the dichotomy between *Naturvölker* and *Kulturvölker* was central to the production of colonised space as empty and accessible for settlement; if indigenous peoples were not human, the land could be appropriated. Under the impact of Dernburg's reorganisation of colonial rule after 1907, which focused more on the mobilisation of African labour than the appropriation of land, the dichotomy weakened somewhat.³⁵¹ Yet the dichotomy arguably regained much of its force after the end of the colonial period.

The figure of the primitive occupied a particular place in the European racialised conceptualisation of the globe. One useful contrast to draw is with Orientalism, the other primary conceptual schema governing colonial relations.³⁵² Hegel's *Philosophy of History* presents a particularly forceful account of the difference between the *Natur-* and *Kulturvölker* whose influence carried over to the Weimar period. In his historical schema, 'the Orient' (China and India in particular) forms a part of the historical unfolding of Spirit, existing at earlier/lower stages of consciousness, but nevertheless within historical time. The primitive – represented primarily as the African – is configured as radically *outside* history; Africa is 'the land of childhood, which lying beyond the day of self-conscious history, is enveloped in the dark mantle of Night'.³⁵³ In the Hegelian schema, then, the Orient is configured as the *civilisational* Other to Europe within history, the primitive the *non-civilisational* Other outside of history.³⁵⁴ This distinction reflected in part the demands of different forms of colonial domination, with areas of more extensive settler colonialism in Africa

350 Zimmerman 2001, pp. 49–52. See also Smith (1987), who places a stronger emphasis on the domestic contexts for the development of anthropology. Evans (2010) argues that Zimmerman and others tend to place too much emphasis on continuity, and that pre-1914 anthropology was heterogeneous, with a strong liberal bent. It was during and after the War that the anti-humanist tendencies identified by Zimmerman became hegemonic, Evans argues, with anthropology turning increasingly into a racial science.

351 Zimmerman 2006, 429–34. One corollary of this, he argues, was the more frequent use in the Dernburg period of the term 'Negro' (*Neger*) rather than 'native' (*Eingeborene*).

352 Said 1978.

353 Hegel 1991, p. 91. Highlighting the racial dimension of his argument, Hegel stresses that he is referring to 'Africa proper', which he distinguishes from North Africa and the Nile region. He goes on: 'The peculiarly African character is difficult to comprehend, for the very reason that in reference to it, we must quite give up the principle which naturally accompanies all *our* ideas – the category of Universality... The Negro, as already observed, exhibits the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state' (p. 93).

354 This formulation draws on Eric Wolf's classic critique of these dichotomies (Wolf 1982).

and the Americas configured as primitive, and hence conceptually empty and accessible to settlement.

In aesthetic theory, Wilhelm Worringer's influential contrast between abstraction and empathy builds on this conceptual distinction. Most non-Western art, he argued in 1908, was characterised by an abstraction driven by a fundamental dread of space. The primitive, for whom this tendency is absolute, faces the terror of 'the extended, disconnected, bewildering world of phenomena'.³⁵⁵ Rationalism offered an antidote to this terror that was unavailable to the primitive. The civilised peoples of the East did not fully accept rationalism as part of the dominant mindset, he argues, meaning the fear remained, but on a different footing. 'Their spiritual dread of space, their instinct for the relativity of all that is, did not stand, as with primitive peoples, *before* cognition, but *above* cognition'.³⁵⁶ Worringer thus deployed the oriental and the primitive as relational categories in the constitution of a European rationality, identity, and aesthetic practice, with each playing a fundamentally different role. At the same time, though, he argued for the value of the primitive as a source for a modern creativity.

Many critics, especially conservatives, rejected the modernist fascination with the primitive as itself a sign of degeneration. For Fritz Karpfen primitive artefacts and primitivist art were simply forms of kitsch. The Hottentot and Bushmen, he argues, have intellects 'at the level just above the point of divergence between the human and the ape'.³⁵⁷ Primitive masks belong in ethnological museums, and serve only to distinguish what art is not: '[a]rt is something made with the creative life force [*Herzblutt des Schöpfens*], that infuses into the work the spiritual charisma of the times, elevated to the highest potency. In no case the pumpkin and carnival mask'.³⁵⁸

Karpfen's rejection of the mask is unsurprising given the centrality of African masks to the development of a primitivist aesthetic. For modernist and avant-garde artists, these masks and other forms of 'primitive' culture presented a challenge to European modes of representation and a way of accessing the forgotten source of creative and regenerative energy. In Wilhelm Hausenstein's study of primitive art (he uses the terms 'barbarian' and 'wild' more than

355 Worringer 1997, p. 16. In this primitive fear of a disconnected world we can see where the space opens up for a connection between primitive and modernist art, with its interest in the fragment. The crucial difference, however, is that the latter approach comes at the culmination of the long march through rationalism.

356 Ibid.

357 Karpfen 1925, p. 31.

358 Karpfen 1925, pp. 32–33.

primitive) the primitive and the modern are the two poles of a continuum tracing the loss of a direct connection with nature, a loss that is most evident in European art, with Oriental art at the midpoint between them.³⁵⁹ The primitive is thus outside civilisation, but is also a kind of originary source. From the perspective of Europe, it represents a moment of absolute loss, but also a potent source of regeneration for a fragmented and mechanised modern life.

These primitivist perspectives drew in part on anthropology, although over the course of the Weimar years the field became increasingly integrated with racial science, thus promoting a biologically-determinist understanding of racial inferiority. The influential anthropologist Leo Frobenius represented an exception in this respect. Writing in 1931, Frobenius rejected the dominant view in which the 'shapeless, uncouth giant' of Africa was contrasted with 'Asia, with its infinitely rich structure as a continent, the cradle of so many cultures and of all religions and even – so many people think – of mankind itself'.³⁶⁰ He argued for the complexity and diversity of African cultures, suggesting that the homogenising notion of the primitive needs to be rethought. Nevertheless, this idea returns in some of his arguments.

Africa affords none of the beguiling magic of the Asiatic orient. The destiny of this continent is a harsh and solemn one. The cliché of the luxuriant splendour of the tropics does not fit, and in particular it does not apply to the African. His destiny is labour, earnest, arduous labour. From the cornucopia of painlessly acquired abundance not one drop has fallen to his lot.³⁶¹

This is a rather ascetic primitivism when compared to the lush depictions of a state of nature that were so common in art. Especially notable, though, is that we see the extent to which even in these 'positive' primitivist readings the traces of colonial history emerge, in particular in his invocation of an African labouring destiny. If the labouring African was instrumentalised in the

359 Hausenstein 1922, pp. 28–35. He draws a distinction between barbaric and exotic art, with the former 'domesticated' (p. 57) to varying degrees in different parts of the world. It is the barbaric (which he is valorising) that marks the truly primitive art.

360 Frobenius 1973, p. 56.

361 Frobenius 1973, p. 76. Frobenius also conceptualised 'culture' as a phenomenon that in a sense existed apart from its bearers, enabling him to combine a discussion of the significance of African cultures with a frequently racist contempt for actual Africans (see Zimmerman 2001, pp. 207–8). Frobenius' celebration of African culture was taken up by Africentric thinkers, most notably Léopold Sédor Senghor.

colonial project, Froebenius tends to do the same in his anthropology. This can be seen in his 1923 claim that 'Africa awakes', which in fact refers to an awakening *within Europe* of the importance of African culture rather than any autonomous African development.³⁶²

Many of these tendencies were elaborated in primitivist aesthetic theory and art history in the Weimar period, fields in which Eckart von Sydow was the most prominent figure. The publication by the prestigious Propyläen Verlag in 1923 of his lavishly illustrated *The Art of the Primitives and of Pre-History* (*Die Kunst der Naturvölker und der Vorzeit*) crystallised the primitivist model, developing a reading of both the powerful importance the primitive could have for European culture, and also its radical alterity. For Sydow, the differences between primitive and modern art were a function of their very different corresponding social forms. This was evident in the isolated position of the artist in modern society. Primitive art was a socially integrated practice, an expression of the primitive social totality. This meant that a useful art (*Gebrauchskunst*) represents the primary form of primitive cultural production.³⁶³ The critic Adolf Behne made a similar point about oriental art, arguing that for Indian art in particular it makes little sense to talk of 'style' as art is integrated into the social totality. 'Artists are those who feel most intensively the experience of unity and the intention of the work in themselves'.³⁶⁴ In the case of primitive art even this limited differentiation is no longer relevant. As produced by *Naturvölker*, primitive art is expressive of a wholly integrated social totality that exists as a fact of nature.

The 'aesthetic function' (as Sydow calls it) of primitive art was thus fundamentally different from that of modern art in modern mass society, although we can see echoes here of the Expressionist dreams we saw in the last chapter of a transcendent social order in which art and society merge. 'The emphasis for the primitive therefore lies with feeling, for the modern mass with will. One can perhaps best formulate the fundamental difference in this way: the life of the soul of the primitive is static, that of the masses, dynamic in nature – or also: the individuals of primitive society are brought together by the given, mass society by the desired'.³⁶⁵ While Sydow's book is ostensibly about primitive art, then, it is profoundly shaped by its desire to define European culture and society through a series of oppositions, with the dichotomies between

362 Frobenius 1923, p. 20.

363 Sydow 1923, pp. 11–12; 43–49; 78–80. The idea of an art for use was very influential amongst radical artists, playwrights, composers, and others throughout the period.

364 Behne 1919, p. 15.

365 Sydow 1923, p. 12.

static and active, unconscious and conscious, at their heart. He traces different art forms – building, sculpture, painting – where these basic dichotomies shape his argument. For example, he contends that: ‘the fundamental character of primitive forms of building [*naturvölkischen Bauweise*] involves feeling and the consciousness of the unity of all things. European architecture [*Architektur*] arose out of the creative will for the independence of human subjectivity’.³⁶⁶ Hausenstein echoes these dichotomies, but gives them a more critical tenor. He argues that ‘illiterate’ barbarian architecture poses a fundamental challenge to the ‘literate’ construction of modern Europe that, in building advertising fronts rather than houses, has entirely lost the primal spirit.³⁶⁷

Primitivist dichotomies were expressive of very different relationships to nature and the body, and a very different conception of spirit. For Sydow, rather than the rationalist spirit of Europe, ‘the high point of primitive [*naturvölkischen*] productivity is the vital spirit, but its center is the person, and more specifically the person as flesh and blood body that simultaneously has a sort of spiritual meaning and life-force flowing through it . . . The spiritual function in itself, detached from its connection with the bodily, does not yet exist’.³⁶⁸ This bodily rootedness, leading to what Theodor Wilhelm Danzel called a ‘fully desubjectified’ art,³⁶⁹ is part of the broader sense of unity governing primitive society. Modern society, by contrast, is built on the separation of the bodily from the spiritual. A symptom of this, Sydow argued in a 1921 article, is the radical separation of the animal from the human realm. Even in Darwinism the animal is projected onto a distant past. Primitive society is very different; wearing an animal mask, for instance, imbues one directly with the spirit of the animal, embodying the integrated unity of human and nature.³⁷⁰

While I have been focusing especially on the African projections of primitivist thought, Sydow’s framework allowed for the collapsing of a vast range of cultural, geographical, and temporal locations, from Africa to the South Seas, Australia to the Americas. Sydow’s book touches on these different locations,

366 Sydow 1923, p. 17. Note here his use of the term *Bauweise* for ‘primitive’ building (the chapter title refers as well to *Baukunst*, or the art of building), and *Architektur* for European. As with Prinzhorn’s use of *Bildnerei* rather than *Kunst* for the art of the mentally ill, these different terms cement the extent to which Sydow sees the former as unconscious, lacking the ability to plan characteristic of architects.

367 Hausenstein 1922, p. 10.

368 Sydow 1923, pp. 20–21.

369 Danzel 1919, p. 29.

370 Sydow 1921, pp. 206–9.

but a significant component of the book also deals with prehistoric³⁷¹ European cultures, and it is here that the function of the primitive as a relational category for the constitution of the European becomes clearest. Linking Africa and other primitive areas with European prehistory was common in primitivist discourses. Most ethnological museums in Germany in fact drew their material primarily from these prehistoric European sources; it was only the larger museums that had access to the colonial networks through which non-European artefacts were collected. Thus, in their visits to these museums, primitivist artists and theorists drew on the lessons of ethnographic studies that conflated European prehistory with the primitive. Despite these confluences, Europe remained distinct in Sydow's work, with the discussion of European prehistory in the last part of the book the first time that he specifies places and times. He carefully delineates time periods (from the later stone age to the iron age), the influences exerted on this prehistoric art (from the Orient, Greece, and North Africa), and the movement of peoples that made it up. Unlike the extra-historical nature of the primitive, which has no temporal location, European prehistory is perhaps more accurately a proto-history. This proto-history is also incipiently national; it is the emergence of northern Germanic peoples that provides the transition into history.³⁷²

In 1920, three years before he published his book on primitivism, Sydow's *German Expressionist Culture and Painting* (*Die deutsche expressionistische Kultur und Malerei*) had given a powerful defence of the movement, and a sense of its connections with primitivism. Written in the full flush of post-War Expressionism, the book addressed the central role that primitivism played in what Sydow argued was the regeneration of European art. The themes that he pursued more soberly in his later book were evident here as well. Sydow argued explicitly against Worringer's conception of the primitive, offering an alternative anthropological approach; where Worringer saw abstraction as a fearful primitive response to the yawning gulf between subject and object, Sydow argued that primitive life was in fact based on a unity of human and nature that he identified as a form of 'communism'.³⁷³ The Expressionist dream we saw earlier of a unity transcending the fragmentations of modern life was grounded here on a primitivist foundation.

371 In the context of my argument here, the term 'prehistory' (*Vorgeschichte*) itself is tendentious rather than descriptive in nature, built around a primitivist understanding of this culture.

372 Sydow 1923, pp. 81–84.

373 Sydow 1920, p. 21. The term he uses most frequently in this book to designate 'primitives' is *Wilde*.

Sydow offers Expressionism as a counterpoint to a negative artistic and philosophical decadence which he suggests comes out of a profoundly bourgeois experience; primitivism provides the path for its overcoming. 'The way out of the decadent attitude [is] through a radicalisation of the life-force [*Lebenswillens*]: not reform, but revolution as the precondition for a thorough renewal: the return then to primal origins, to the primitive stage of humanity, and through there reaching a higher, more just, culture'.³⁷⁴ For Sydow, this utopian Expressionism is configured very explicitly as a form of social and cultural hygiene. The development of Expressionism 'needs to be understood as a counter-measure against a fundamental vital illness [*Lebenskrankheit*] in European culture' expressed in the turn to decadence. Primitivist 'healing' is produced through Expressionism, but also, he says, through an anarchistic and communistic politics. By this he means neither concrete political movements nor that of coffee-house intellectuals. Rather, he looks to 'eugenicists or life reformers', including those at Ascona, as his examples.³⁷⁵ Sydow's arguments thus draw on ideas circulating at the time that he wrote his book, namely the radical Expressionism that we saw in the last chapter, claiming for art a kind of radical social hygienic function.

For Sydow the primitive is not intrinsically valuable, but rather a resource or medium for this European regeneration. Further cementing the hygienic implications of his approach, he configures this transformation in terms of 'blood':

Blood is in fact spirit that has not yet reached the clarity of its maturity, but has begun this development. Blood and its lodestar, instinct, is, so to speak, the embryo of spirit, it is spirit in its primitive simplicity. We thus see here in the importance attached to the unconscious in creative action the return of Expressionism to the origin of life.³⁷⁶

Sydow's use of blood here is of course in part metaphorical, but his configuration of cultural regeneration as a form of eugenics suggests that blood is also in a certain sense literally blood. The integration of blood and spirit expresses the desire for totality that runs through the primitivist project, a unity ultimately found not in primitive society itself (which remains unconscious), but

374 Sydow 1920, p. 27.

375 Sydow 1920, p. 12.

376 Sydow 1920, p. 58. Utzinger 1921, pp. 205–6 uses the Jungian term 'mythological fantasies' to describe primitive mentalities buried deep in the structures of our brains (*Hirnstruktur*), mentalities that contemporary creative figures like Paul Klee access.

in the fulfilment of the principle of body and blood in a transcendent German/European cultural and social totality.

There is little translation needed here to establish the conceptual affinities between the settler colonial dream of national regeneration and this vision of cultural transformation, although the political stakes were significantly different. Indeed, the colonial and primitivist projects remained tightly intertwined in paradoxical fashion. The latter depended on the former for its material, but colonial practices simultaneously undermined the primitivist ground. As supposedly pre-conscious primitive bodies were violently remade as super-exploited labour or annihilated in genocidal programmes, and as the dispossession of colonised peoples continued apace, the quest for the primitive became ever more difficult. The notorious anthropological 'problem' of the disappearing primitive was a notion shared by many art historians; indeed, if the value of the primitive lay in the purity of its extra-historical location, that value was destroyed by the very economic and social processes that opened up the primitive to exploitation.

This impossible search for origins, for an 'outside' to capitalist modernity, fastened on various objects.³⁷⁷ The quest frequently found its ur-form in the figure of the 'Bushmen'³⁷⁸ of present-day Namibia who became central to anthropological and popular debates over human origins, both in Germany and abroad.³⁷⁹ This was reflected in the book *Buschmannkunst* (*Bushman Art*)

377 Hausenstein, for example, favoured the South Seas islanders depicted in the works of Emil Nolde and others as the 'purest' primitives (1922, p. 57).

378 The politics of naming is difficult here, as so often in colonial contexts. The term 'Bushman' is of course a colonial invention that designates a heterogeneous group of people(s). 'San' is another umbrella term preferred by some, and a range of other names designate linguistically and geographically distinct groups from the area. 'Bushmen' has, however, come to be used as a self-designation by some (and challenged by others), a reclamation that the anthropologist Robert Gordon supports, arguing that 'it is important that we make social banditry [which was at the root of the name] respectable again, for of all the southern African people exposed to the colonial onslaught, those labelled "Bushmen" have the longest, most valiant, if costly, record of resistance to colonialism' (Gordon and Douglas 2000, pp. 6–7). See Suzman 1999 for a discussion of contemporary Omaheke Bushmen that seeks to break the hold of the dominant conception of the Bushmen as an extra-historical primitive community by focusing on labour and their integration into, and super-exploitation on, settler farms under German colonial rule.

379 Gordon 2003. Gordon stresses that the configuration of the Bushmen as a vanishing trace of human origins also served to increase the value of the artefacts being systematically appropriated by German collectors. As an American anthropologist commented in 1908, 'Practically every German in the colony is a collector' (quoted on p. 278). Gordon also mentions the testimony of the South African Werner Eiselen, the son of a German

jointly written by the anthropologist Hugo Obermaier and the art historian Herbert Kühn – the latter we saw in the previous chapter commenting on Expressionism and socialism. Whereas such primitivist critics as Worringer and Carl Einstein focused on the formal qualities of primitive art, this lavishly illustrated book took an anthropological approach to the Bushmen and their art, making explicit the connections that I have been drawing here. Obermaier and Kühn gave this a strong racial cast – the book opens with craniometric and physiognomic considerations of Bushmen bodies – but the focus is on the exploration of the Bushmen as a living example of a primitive form of life that, the authors argue, was similar to early European cultures. The Bushmen ‘embody a dying relic of Paleolithic times’,³⁸⁰ and produce what they call a ‘fossilised art’.³⁸¹ Obermaier and Kühn differentiate Bushmen anthropologically and artistically from black Africans more generally, arguing that they exist in an even more primitive state closer to nature. Indeed, it is not only contact with Europeans but also with other Africans that is undermining the primitive purity of Bushman culture, making their study all the more important.³⁸² The desire for origins dovetails with notions of purity developed in racial science, and represents the flipside of the fear of miscegenation so prominent in Weimar anxieties, the bodies of the Bushmen representing an idea of purity that was equally pathological.

Bushman art for Obermaier and Kühn is characterised by its mimicry of nature and its rhythms, and hence an almost complete lack of a conceptual

missionary, and one of the architects of Apartheid, at a 1965 hearing at the International Court of Justice in The Hague. He justified South Africa's rule of Namibia by invoking the Bushmen who ‘have never settled down, who never endeavoured to produce, but live merely by collecting’ (quoted on p. 281). This is a time-honoured justification for colonial appropriation of land, but it is especially interesting in the contest of the politics of collecting practiced by the Germans; the constitution of the Bushmen as in this case degenerate ‘early’ humans who ‘merely collected’ was ironically produced through the collecting impulse of the German colonial state.

380 Obermaier and Kühn 1930, p. 3. This desire to record a dying people was captured especially vividly in the short film *Bushman Speaking into the Phonograph* made in 1908 by the Austrian physician Rudolf Pösch. The film depicts the Bushman Kubi recording stories on a phonograph, a staged encounter between the primitive body and modern technology enabling the capture of the disappearing primitive (see Oksiloff 2001, pp. 51–57).

381 Obermaier and Kühn 1930, p. 44.

382 The primitivist celebration of primal origins of course had as its mirror-image the denunciation of Bushmen as savages. This was evident in the German colonial state in Southwest Africa, which, by 1905, drew a distinction between natives (*Eingeborenen*) and Bushmen (*Buschleute*), ascribing an even lower value to the lives of the latter (see Gordon and Douglas 2000, p. 52).

quality.³⁸³ 'The object to him is reality, not symbol or meaning, as it is with the animistically inclined Negro [*Neger*].'³⁸⁴ Drawing a comparison with the Paleolithic rock painting found in Spain that was Obermaier's particular area of specialisation, Obermaier and Kühn argue that Bushman art is 'body-less' and two-dimensional. Its significance is not simply or primarily aesthetic, but as a magical function that is a reflex of an unmediated relationship with nature.³⁸⁵ This is the source of its value to the European, an argument made more generally by Frobenius about Africa. Africa, Frobenius argues, offers Europe a meaning far more fundamental than does the Orient: '[w]ith its ungainly limbs, giant Africa touches our souls in places that are inaccessible to the tentacles of the Kraken Asia'.³⁸⁶

The primitivist search thus involved a profoundly contradictory translation of the colonial logic into a quest for the liberation of the European subject. As John Noyes argues in relation to the German colonial novel, the projections of primitive bodies represented a key European response to the contradictions of capitalist modernity: 'this projection was articulated as a dialectic of European and non-European subjectivity, but it was enforced by embodying the problematic aspects of national subjectivity in the person of the "native". The nomadic native becomes the object and the victim of European man's self-perception as a castaway in a hostile world, a world where subjective unity undergoes a radical dispersal, that Benjaminian world in which the only constants are the sky and the fragility of the human body'.³⁸⁷ For Benjamin, though, as we saw in the last chapter, this radically bereft image of the body was a dialectical image, a response to the alienated state of capitalist modernity that eschewed the nostalgic unity of the primitivist moment.

383 An example of this conception of the Bushmen in popular culture comes in Remarque's famous anti-war novel *All Quiet on the Western Front*. He argues that life at the front during the War was reduced to this bare, primitive animality: 'In the outward form of our life we are hardly distinguishable from Bushmen; but whereas the latter can be so always, because they are so truly, and at best may develop further by exertion of their spiritual forces, with us it is the reverse; – our inner forces are not exerted toward regeneration, but toward degeneration. The Bushmen are primitive and naturally so, but we are primitive in an artificial sense, and by virtue of the utmost effort' (Remarque 1994, pp. 296–97).

384 Obermaier and Kühn 1930, p. 19.

385 Obermaier and Kühn 1930, pp. 57–63.

386 Frobenius 1923, p. 5. In the introduction, Frobenius highlights the extent to which the War produced a fundamental change in his own thinking on Africa as well as on broader conceptions of the continent (see pp. ix–x).

387 Noyes 1998, p. 105.

Not all primitivist approaches simply reproduced a colonial logic, however. Wilhelm Hausenstein, for instance, argued that 'primitive' art should not be understood as a geographical phenomenon or an expression of a particular community.³⁸⁸ Rather, the 'barbarian' represented a universal creative orientation, a 'wild complement' or creative flux that was suppressed in Europe, but was given greater scope in other cultural contexts.³⁸⁹ The virtue of Hausenstein's approach is that he decoupled his reading of primitivism from a purely naturalised sense of geographical and racial difference, writing forcefully against the anti-humanist tradition that, as we saw earlier, had come to dominate German anthropology. Two other figures, the art critic and theorist Carl Einstein and the artist Hannah Höch, took these critical insights further. Both sought to denaturalise conceptions of the primitive, with Höch developing a powerful critical response to the racialised and gendered dimensions of primitivism. Both produced work, in other words, that stood within the primitivist tradition, but that critically thematised its own conditions of possibility.

Einstein and Höch were affiliated with the Dada movement. As we have seen, Einstein co-edited issues of the Dada journals *Der blutige Ernst* and *Die Pleite*, eventually becoming one of the key critics and theorists of the German avant-garde. He was on the political left of Dada, with his experience of war radicalising both his politics – leading him to participate in the soldiers' councils in Brussels, join the Spartacus League and, after the War, the KPD – and his aesthetics.³⁹⁰ Despite his engagements with Dada and post-Dada art, it was French art, Cubism in particular, that Einstein saw as the most significant development in modern art. Cubism also triggered his extensive engagement with African art. However, while he sought parallels between African art and European modernist innovations, his aesthetic theory worked to undo the dichotomous structures of primitivism.³⁹¹

Einstein's *Negerplastik* ('African Sculpture' or 'Negro Sculpture'³⁹²), published in 1915, consisted of an introductory essay followed by 119 images of

388 Hausenstein 1922, p. 40.

389 Hausenstein 1922, p. 90.

390 Fleckner 2005 provides an excellent account of the intersections between Einstein's politics and aesthetic theory. On his politics, see also Kiefer 1990; Braun 1994. While the subsequent defeat of the German revolution left Einstein disillusioned, he later returned to a more active political role, joining the anarcho-syndicalist forces in the Spanish Civil War (see Meffre 1994).

391 See Archer-Straw 2000, pp. 59–64 for a discussion of the European contexts of art criticism in which Einstein's work was situated.

392 Einstein 1915. The written portion of the book has been translated as 'Negro Sculpture' by Charles W. Haxthausen and Sebastian Zeidler (Einstein 2004) and as 'African Sculpture'

African sculpture. In the essay Einstein argues against dominant primitivist understandings of African art, contending that the tendency to read it in relation to European aesthetic categories misses its significance as an autonomous form of artistic production. Unlike Frobenius' notion of a pristine autonomy, however, Einstein offered a much more concrete and historical approach to the problem that resisted the primitivist desire for origins and that engaged critically with the processes of colonial knowledge production. The primitive, for Einstein, was a European aesthetic and social category, and needed to be analysed as such; indeed, his one essay entitled 'On Primitive Art' was a commentary on European art that said nothing about African or other forms of art traditionally designated 'primitive'.

Through a formal analysis that largely eschews the anthropological approach so common in primitivist art criticism, Einstein argues in *Negerplastik* that African sculpture is fundamentally different from the European in that it works in three dimensions. European sculpture, he contends, developed out of the painterly tradition that also foregrounded the artist as individual creator. 'The three-dimensional was eliminated; the personal "script" carried the day'.³⁹³ Drawing on anthropological notions of African fetishism, Einstein argues that the three-dimensional approach stems from a desire to embody the god in a self-contained unity distanced from any sense of individual 'creativity' on the part of the sculptor.³⁹⁴ It thereby embodies a very different and more profound kind of realism. Rejecting dominant understandings of African art that stress its non-representational qualities (Worringer's abstraction), he argues that 'what looks like abstraction in Europe is an immediate and natural given in Africa. In formal terms African sculpture will prove to be the most powerful realism'.³⁹⁵

The invocation of a natural given here does echo primitivist accounts, but Einstein shies away from either ethnographic or racial associations. 'I find it

by Joachim Neugroschel (Einstein 2003). While the former is the more literal translation, Neugroschel argues that because the text approaches the art geographically, as African, rather than racially, as black, 'African Sculpture' captures its meaning more accurately. This approach may be too revisionist, but also confuses matters somewhat as Einstein published a book entitled *Afrikanische Plastik* in 1921 (Einstein 1996, 2, pp. 61–145); indeed, using this different term was part of a shift in his thinking to a more historically and socially grounded sense of African sculpture. In referring to both *Negerplastik* and *Afrikanische Plastik*, I will simply leave the titles untranslated, and will use the Neugroschel translation of the former text.

393 Einstein 2003, p. 80.

394 Einstein 2003, pp. 82–84.

395 Einstein 2003, p. 81.

dubious', he says, 'to view art as a guide to anthropological or ethnological insights, since an artistic depiction says little about the facts on which this scholarship relies'.³⁹⁶ Rather, his conclusions are drawn from his understanding of the formal qualities of the work; the images in the book are in this sense much more than illustrative, conveying instead the substance of his argument.³⁹⁷ African sculpture, he contends, is profoundly spatial and totalising, absorbing motion and time into spatial representation and creating 'space as a totality and as a complete identity of individual optics and viewing'.³⁹⁸ This, he suggests, is something that Cubist and other avant-garde art is gesturing towards, but in a distorted form; the social contexts of modern art are very different.

While Einstein's formalist approach would seem to sidestep a consideration of social processes, this is not the case. Indeed, Einstein argues that this formalist perspective is necessitated by a lack of knowledge on the part of the European critic. He speculates on the basis of the art that 'a major African civilization has perished',³⁹⁹ but argues that in fact Europeans know nothing of specific African histories and social contexts. Aside from a few pieces, most African art is undated, and there is thus no knowledge of the complex social interactions and hybridisations that lie behind the artefacts that have been collected. He therefore argues against theories of origin that posit the simplicity of these allegedly 'earlier' cultures: '[w]e should discard the notion that simple and initial are identical'.⁴⁰⁰ It is because of this lack of (European) knowledge that he is constrained to rely on a formal analysis of the art; his argument rejects the colonising position of mastery and epistemological certitude underwriting the dominant primitivist account.

Einstein developed this argument more concretely in *Afrikanische Plastik* ('African Sculpture') published in 1921. The book had a similar form to *Negerplastik*, but by this point he had sharpened his critique of primitivist assumptions. 'Exoticism', he argues in leading off the book, 'is often unproductive Romanticism'.⁴⁰¹ As in *Negerplastik*, he contends that any understanding of African art was necessarily limited by lack of knowledge. Colonialism and its attendant anthropological and art historical narratives, he argues, were practices of knowledge production, but those colonial practices themselves also produced the epistemological void in which African art now stood:

396 Einstein 2003, p. 78.

397 This is a point developed in more detail in Zeidler 2004.

398 Einstein 2003, pp. 84–87, quote p. 87.

399 Einstein 2003, p. 77.

400 Einstein 2003, p. 78.

401 'Afrikanische Plastik', in Einstein 1996, 2, p. 61.

Africa's creative cultural energies are mostly exhausted. The old tradition is crumbling under colonisation, ancestral imagination mixed with imported views. This coupling with spiritually foreign elements gave rise to a blurriness difficult to penetrate, an internal wavering, and an almost childlike moodiness in the African mentality. The uncertainty and questionable nature of these areas of imagination is most likely the sign of an historical ending.⁴⁰²

While the suggestion of childlikeness betrays a lack of recognition of the ways in which colonised peoples challenged and negotiated these unequal cultural hybridisations, it is equally significant that for Einstein the childlike qualities stemmed not from a racial essence, but from colonial histories. Indeed, rejecting the primitivist desire for static racial purity, he insists that African peoples and cultures themselves were hybrid and mixed entities that had changed over time.⁴⁰³ The primitivist notion of pre- or ahistorical peoples, not to mention the racist schema of those panicked by the threats of miscegenation, is thus exposed as the function of material colonial histories.⁴⁰⁴

This reading of 'primitive art' as a product of the imposition of European aesthetic and social categories does not prevent Einstein from suggesting parallels between African sculpture and modernist art, especially the Cubism that, from *Negerplastik* on, he saw as the most significant form of radical art. Einstein's point, though, is that 'primitive art' designates primarily a *European* practice, an argument evident in the 1919 essay of the same name cited earlier. Written in the heat of his participation in the post-War revolutions, that essay says nothing of African art, but rather considers what art can and should do in such a revolutionary context. 'European art', he argues, 'is entangled in the process of differentiated capitalisation'. This art, like the economic order in which it is embedded, is reactionary and doomed to failure; it 'gives the bourgeois the fiction of aesthetic revolt'.⁴⁰⁵

402 'Afrikanische Plastik', in Einstein 1996, 2, p. 61.

403 'Afrikanische Plastik', in Einstein 1996, 2, pp. 62–64. Here he also gives an interesting alternative climatological approach. Rather than the dominant view of African climate as a driver of primitivity (for Frobenius, for example, producing labourers), he argues that the climate makes the preservation of artefacts much more difficult, exacerbating the lack of knowledge about concrete social and historical conditions (pp. 61–62).

404 As Andreas Michel argues, over the course of the Weimar period, and especially under the influence of Freudian theories that argued for the equivalence of children and primitives, Einstein moved to a more classically primitivist position (1998, pp. 155–58).

405 'Zur primitiven Kunst' in Einstein 1996, 2, p. 27.

The dilemma for European primitivism is thus how to critically negotiate and produce a new social order. A 'collective art' must be premised on social revolution. He defines this art thus:

Primitive art: Rejection of the capitalised artistic heritage . . . In exploding the ideology of capitalism, we find buried the only valuable remains of the crashed continent, the prerequisite of anything new, the simple masses, who still remain imprisoned by suffering. They are the artists.⁴⁰⁶

Einstein's primitivism thus seeks after the same renewal, the same overcoming, that underlay the primitivist project more generally. The characteristic so often ascribed to African or other 'primitive' societies, namely the lack of differentiated 'artists', is here presented as the social and political solution to capitalist alienation; it is located in Europe. This was a vision held by many radicals in the period, as we saw especially in the case of the artist-revolutionaries of Munich in the last chapter. There remains a powerful nostalgia for 'the simple masses' in Einstein's work, but his primitivism is remarkable for its rejection of a nostalgic notion of essentialised and racialised difference. If European primitivism can serve as an emancipatory aesthetic project, the colonial 'primitive' is by contrast the product of exploitative colonial relations. Implicit in his account is thus an anti-capitalism coupled with an anti-colonialism.

Einstein's critical project therefore resisted the allure of the primitive that drew in so many of his Dadaist colleagues, producing a relatively unique and subtle analysis of the colonial implications of debates over aesthetics and politics. The one Dadaist who offered an equally powerful social critique of the logic of primitivism was Hannah Höch, one of the few women involved in the movement. Especially in her series of photomontages collectively entitled 'From an Ethnographic Museum', Höch developed a powerful analysis of the intersections of colonialism, racialisation, consumer culture, practices of collecting, gender, and sexuality. These works, produced in the mid- and late 1920s, combined photographs of artefacts from ethnographic museums and art magazines – especially the art dealer Alfred Flechtheim's *Der Querschnitt* – with images drawn from popular magazines. The latter had long been a source for her work, most famously in *Cut with the Kitchen Knife Dada through the Last Weimar Beer Belly Cultural Epoch of Germany* from 1919–20. In this montage she combined news photos of various political leaders with text and other images drawn from newspapers and magazines, in particular the *BIZ*, the

406 'Zur primitiven Kunst', in Einstein 1996, 2, p. 27.

mass-circulation illustrated paper owned by Ullstein, the publisher for whom Höch herself worked throughout the first half of the Weimar period.⁴⁰⁷

As the name of the series suggests, 'From an Ethnographic Museum' was highly attuned to the practices of collecting that, as I have discussed, enabled the primitivist project. As with so many other modernist and avant-garde artists, she visited ethnographic museums in search of inspiration, with her visit to the Rijks Ethnographisch Museum in Leiden in 1926 proving to be especially significant.⁴⁰⁸ While primitivism more broadly tended to amplify the decontextualisation of artefacts evident in museums themselves, Höch's work directly addressed the practices of colonial acquisition and their attendant racialised assumptions. Thus, many of her works were given a second framing within the frame, and her constructions frequently sat on pedestals, often oversized and somewhat absurd, thereby highlighting their status as representations.⁴⁰⁹ By integrating museum sources with those from mass circulation magazines, Höch highlights the extent to which ethnographic, scientific, and popular discourses of colonialism were interconnected and mutually sustaining. Her work thus implied that scientific collecting was another instance of commodified culture, throwing into stark relief its pretensions to objectivity or its claim to offer access to an unmediated originary culture.

A common theme running through the series was the juxtaposition of fragments of women's faces and bodies with 'primitive' artefacts. Throughout her work Höch developed critical analyses of the gendered relations and body politics of the Weimar period.⁴¹⁰ In her *Strange Beauty* from 1929, Höch mobilises the exoticising implications of primitive art to comment on artistic and mass cultural sexualisation of women (Ill. 21). In this instance, the primitivist use of the mask is doubled back on itself. Used more commonly as a marker of the radically other, the mask here serves to defamiliarise the modern itself. The addition of disproportionate glasses renders the modern cultural fetishes of the mask and the body of the woman strange and hybrid. The naked body of the woman also links 'high' and 'low', simultaneously evoking the sexualised imagery of the popular photographic press and the classical painted nude.

407 See Biro 2009, pp. 65–103 for a detailed reading of the work.

408 Makela 1996, pp. 70–72; Lavin 1993, pp. 159–184.

409 Interestingly, in *Negerplastik*, a work that Höch frequently referenced, Einstein argues that one of the things that distinguishes African sculpture is that 'most of these works have no pedestal or similar support... the god is never pictured as anything but a self-sufficient being, requiring no aid of any kind' (Einstein 2003, p. 83). The addition of prominent pedestals thus emphasised the distance of the artefact from its original contexts.

410 Lavin 1993, pp. 161–63.



ILLUSTRATION 21 *Hannah Höch, Fremde Schönheit (Strange Beauty), 1929, photomontage with watercolour, 11.3 × 20.3 cm.*

© ESTATE OF HANNAH HÖCH/SODRAC (2014).



ILLUSTRATION 22 *Hannah Höch, Liebe im Busch (Love in the Bush), 1925, photomontage with collage, 22.8 × 21.6 cm.*

© ESTATE OF HANNAH HÖCH/SODRAC (2014).

This is indeed a 'strange beauty', the montage destabilising the dichotomies of primitive and modern, mass culture and classical art, and in the process accenting the artificiality of naturalised conceptions of both the primitive and the feminine body.

Techniques of photomontage (of which Höch was one of the originators) were frequently used by avant-garde artists in order to produce these effects of defamiliarisation or estrangement. However, especially given her own work in the commercial media, Höch was acutely aware that these techniques were also mobilised in advertising. It was here, and in other media productions, that mutually sustaining discourses of gender, sexuality, and race were especially pronounced, structured by the imperatives of commodified cultural production. Thus, as Elza Adamowicz stresses, the tendency to read Höch's work primarily as a critique of German gender relations misses the centrality of her engagements with racial and colonial discourses.⁴¹¹ In a series on 'Love' created before she embarked on 'From an Ethnographic Museum', Höch had already begun to explore these connections. Her 1925 montage *Love in the Bush* is especially significant as it critically addresses a number of the colonial themes discussed earlier, particularly the widespread fears of miscegenation and threatening black male sexuality (Ill. 22). Coming on the heels of the resurrection of the 'Black Horror' campaign during the 1923 reoccupation of the Ruhr by the French, the combination of a happy and flirtatious white woman with a black man/child spoke directly to the intersections of race and gender in Weimar culture and politics.⁴¹²

The monstrous construction of both figures performs a radical miscegenation. The woman's head springs directly from what appear to be male legs, while the head of the male child is perched atop women's legs. The excessively long arms of this last hybrid figure suggest the dominant stereotype of a grasping black male sexuality, although the fact that it is a child's head suggests the threat is fantastic rather than actual. This implication is strengthened by the expression of seeming pleasure on the face of the woman, a particularly subversive presentation in a cultural context where the only publicly available understanding of such a coupling was rape. The title reinforces this reading. 'Love in the bush', as we saw with writers like Volquarts or Krueger, was certainly a site of desire in the culture of the period, but this was configured in exclusively male terms. By placing female sexual pleasure at the centre of

411 Adamowicz 2011.

412 See Van Hoesen 2010, pp. 209–13; Makela 1996.

the image, Höch challenged the regulation of female sexuality through racial terror and offered a profoundly subversive image of sexual, gender, and racial transgression.

Höch was very aware of the pleasures of the image on which the political economy of the illustrated press was grounded. The selling of the forbidden, its illicit pleasures placed in the service of repression, drove the market, especially in popular versions of colonial nostalgia. It is this popular culture of colonialist sexuality that *Love in the Bush* so deftly reworks and subverts. There are potential problems with her rereading, evident especially in her retention of an infantilising depiction of black male sexuality and her focus on white women's pleasure, but, especially by contrast with the profoundly gendered and misogynist imagery produced by Otto Dix, George Grosz, and other Dadaists, the challenge that her work provided to the predominantly male avant-garde is clear. The nostalgia for a masculine bodily wholeness underlying the work of a Dix, which she reconfigures as a primitivist impulse, is refused. Höch arguably went further than any of her colleagues in developing the dialectical tension at the heart of the Dadaist project. Her work performed a radical miscegenation that subverted both gendered and racialised hierarchies, her hybrid bodies denaturalising these figures, opening them up to a critical reimagination and offering new and potentially more emancipatory forms of desire.

The alternative perspectives opened up in Höch's work can be read back through the various thematic tendencies we have looked at in relation to the Weimar avant-garde. Höch's production of hybrid bodies challenged the nostalgic and stabilising tendencies of dominant conceptions of embodiment, her shocking configurations seeking to generate alternative forms of recognition and misrecognition. As we have seen throughout this chapter, in a host of ways the desire for an embodied unity and transcendence animated the work of many radical artists, often in profoundly regressive ways. By drawing out these dialectical tensions, Höch developed a critical vocabulary of great importance. Her work also highlighted the deep connections between artistic practice and popular culture, in particular that of the new media of photography, illustrated magazines, and film, and the ways in which forms of embodiment and ideas of hygiene and purity were articulated in both areas. It is to these popular cultures that the next chapter turns.

Transforming Vision: Film, Photography, and the Politics of Social Hygiene

5.1 Introduction: The Birth of *Homo Cinematicus*

Writing in *Deutsches Volkstum* in 1919, the conservative cultural critic Wilhelm Stapel lamented the advent of film, arguing that '[t]he cinema is forming a new type of human being, inferior both intellectually and morally: the *Homo cinematicus*'.¹ Stapel's comment reflected a broader unease with the new medium of film that was felt especially strongly in the aftermath of the War. For cultural conservatives like Stapel, who was a vocal German nationalist and anti-semitic,² the post-War lifting of censorship had exacerbated the already questionable moral impact of the cinema, but film had its detractors across the political spectrum. The 'cinema debates' (*Kino-Debatte*) so prominent in the early decades of the twentieth century centred on a number of issues: the status of film as art; its relationship to older forms of cultural production like theatre; and its exacerbation of the fragmenting impact of modern life.³ At the heart of these debates, a point often lost in works on Weimar film, were the profound anxieties over the social hygienic implications of the medium. The exploding size of cinema audiences meant that many, especially bourgeois critics, saw it as a growing threat to the health of the *Volkskörper*. It was not bourgeois audiences that provoked this worry, however, but the exploding numbers of workers, women, and youth who attended film. These were seen as impressionable viewers unequipped to deal with the potentially dangerous themes of movies, and with the medium itself.

The commercial character of film was arguably that which made it seem so threatening to so many, but also that which drove film's development. Both the left and the right were deeply troubled by this aspect of the industry, although they approached the issue in very different ways. Conservatives perceived the promiscuous and uncontrolled expansion of the medium primarily as a moral

1 Quoted in Cowan 2008, p. 295n145.

2 Stapel was influenced in this regard by the racial theory of Hans F.K. Günther, whose work I will examine in detail in the final section of the chapter.

3 The work of Anton Kaes has been instrumental in delineating these debates, although his focus is primarily on the aesthetic questions (see Kaes 1978 and 1987).

threat, while on the left many critics saw capitalist culture, film in particular, as repressive. Adorno's and Horkheimer's later critique of what they called the 'culture industry' had its roots in these Weimar debates.⁴ At the heart of these different perspectives on film was the question of class. For the educated bourgeoisie, the *Bildungsbürgertum*, and many on the right, it was the mass nature of the new medium that made it so dangerous, both in terms of challenging the cultural authority of traditional forms of art such as literature, painting, and theatre, and in producing potentially uncontrolled forms of working-class sociality. Thus, the social hygienist Albert Moll contended that '[t]he power of suggestion of film is so strong, that it can hardly be compared with that of the theatre'.⁵ This power was tied directly to the new working-class audiences attending these films; for Moll and others, the danger represented by film and other mass media was conceptualised in terms of the familiar language of degeneration.

The role of class in left critiques was very different, focusing on film's production of forms of repressive or false consciousness. Despite this focus, however, their critiques often retained strong traces of bourgeois fears over its impact on impressionable new audiences, a point to which I will return at length. The SPD's approach to culture, which sought to claim the bourgeois heritage for the working class, often led them to defend classical bourgeois culture against film. In a 1911 article on 'Cinema as Educator', for instance, the editor of the radical Expressionist journal *Die Aktion* Franz Pfemfert contrasted film, 'this poor imitation of naked reality, this brutal image-reporting',⁶ to true culture.

Stapel shared the radical right fear of film, but his comment goes beyond merely identifying a troubling influence. In speaking of the 'Homo cinematiscus', he was arguing that the new medium in fact produced new forms of perception, embodiment, and subjectivity; in short, a new human. This was the locus of danger. However, while Stapel lamented this shift, other critics, especially amongst the avant-garde, argued that these new forms of subjectivity represented a dramatic and potentially positive transformation. For these critics and artists, film was part of a broader perceptual revolution in which photography also played a key role. Franz Roh and Jan Tschichold described this in

4 They argued that the film industry 'is the triumph of invested capital. To impress the omnipotence of capital on the hearts of expropriated job candidates as the power of their true master is the purpose of all films, regardless of the plot selected by the production directors' (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002, p. 98).

5 Moll 1926, p. 1103.

6 Pfemfert 1911, p. 562.

1929 as the emergence of the 'photo-eye',⁷ which enabled seeing things in new and unexpected ways, reshaping aesthetic practices and our very biological being. For László Moholy-Nagy – perhaps the most influential theorist of new media in the period – film brought these possibilities to full fruition, liberating light and setting it into motion. As he argued in his influential 1927 book *Painting, Photography, Film*, '[s]ince as a rule light phenomena offer greater possibilities in motion than in the static condition, all photographic processes reach their highest level in the film'.⁸

As I will discuss in the first section of the chapter, theorists like Moholy-Nagy often proposed that this bodily and perceptual revolution was profoundly political. In this respect they drew on the Expressionist identification of aesthetic with political transformation, but in turning to the new mass media they proposed a rather different conception of 'socialism'. Indeed, Expressionists like Ernst Toller were much less likely to find an inherently emancipatory potential in film and photography, seeing it instead as a mere surface reflection of social and economic relations. 'I wouldn't dare to say: Film contributed to making culture more superficial. Rather: The cultural superficiality of this mechanistic time found in it its suitable form'.⁹ Toller, writing in 1924, did not discount film's political usefulness, but argued that this was not determined by the technology itself. 'Film today is purely an instrument of profit . . . For us socialists, film could be an incalculably valuable instrument for the struggle'.¹⁰ Here Toller's critique echoed that put forward by Benjamin in his essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility'. As we saw in the third chapter, Benjamin likewise rejected the capitalist film industry while arguing that 'in some cases [he has the Soviet example in mind here] film can also promote revolutionary criticism of social conditions, even of the distribution of property'. Under capitalism, however, 'as a rule no other revolutionary merit can be accredited to today's film than the promotion of a revolutionary criticism of traditional concepts of art'.¹¹

Benjamin and other left critics thus rejected the technological determinist reading of the new media as necessarily aesthetically or politically radical that

7 Roh and Tschichold 1973.

8 Moholy 1967, p. 33.

9 'Film und Staat', in Toller 1978, 1, pp. 114–15. In the previous chapter, we saw already Toller's rejection of reportage as a kind of Biedermeierism that he associated with photography. As with the superficial reportage, film and photography thus tended simply to reflect the social conditions.

10 'Film und Staat', in Toller 1978, 1, p. 115.

11 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in Benjamin 1968, p. 231.

was put forward by some avant-garde theorists and artists. Benjamin paralleled the movement of the filmstrip itself with new forms of production, arguing that 'it cannot be overlooked that the assembly line, which plays such a fundamental role in the process of production, is in a sense represented by the filmstrip in the process of consumption. Both came into being at roughly the same time'.¹² Siegfried Kracauer similarly argued that photography embodied the alienated state of capitalist modernity. It 'is a secretion of the capitalist mode of production. The same mere nature which appears in photography flourishes in the reality of the society produced by the capitalist mode of production . . . the barren self-presentation of spatial and temporal elements belongs to a social order which regulates itself according to economic laws of nature'.¹³

These arguments over the radical potential of film, photography, and other new mass media form a thread running through this chapter, and will be taken up more concretely in the next chapter in an examination of forms of radical worker culture, including film and photography. As I have noted, however, what is remarkable about all of these descriptions is the reading of these new media in terms of their impacts on bodies and subjectivities. Benjamin's direct link between film and the assembly line suggests that the Fordist and Taylorist transformations of production were likewise evident in spheres of consumption and leisure, an argument that informed Adorno and Horkheimer's later analysis of the culture industry. For these left critics the integration of work and leisure implied an ever-intensifying extension of alienated social relations. This alienated state, and the role played by photography and film, was recognised by bourgeois and conservative critics, but reconceptualised through the language and practices of degeneration, social hygiene, and eugenics. Workers, women, children, and other 'less developed' social strata were put at risk by these new media. Driven by a series of moral panics, the mass media thus became the overdetermined locus of anxiety over the fluid and fragmenting nature of modern society, and the site of intense debate and regulation.

The configuration of workers, women, and children as 'at risk' drew heavily on racialised conceptions of the *Volkskörper* that were rooted in ideas of primitivity. As we saw in the previous chapter, the figure of the primitive exerted a powerful draw, inflected in different ways by competing social groups. These perspectives profoundly influenced debates over film. For Thomas Wirth, not only was film itself a 'primitive' medium, but it also spoke to the primitive

12 'The Formula in Which the Dialectical Structure of Film Finds Expression', in Benjamin 2002, p. 94. Charlie Chaplin's success, Benjamin argues, is that he captures this integrated totality.

13 Kracauer, 'Photography' in Kracauer 1995, p. 49.

nature of the lower classes. Early film, he argued, deployed a naturalist aesthetic whose mimetic form was similar to the worldview of the primitive, its impact on 'more developed people' potentially disturbing.¹⁴ By the time he was writing in 1922, he noted, film had shed this naturalistic approach, turning instead to an Expressionistic aesthetic. This new film offered the possibility of displaying the mass 'types' characteristic of the modern age. These images were childlike and brutal, but film's value lay in the fact that it spoke a language that the primitive masses could understand. 'It is possible in film and only in film to endow an individual with characteristics, emotions, and the will of the masses. Only in the bodyless, mute creature that we encounter on the screen is it possible to realise the final consequences of the umbrella term "masses".'¹⁵

In its direct address to the primitive masses, film thus demonstrated both a profound danger and a powerful pedagogical potential. This fundamental ambivalence was recognised across the political spectrum, if in very different ways. Writers like Toller, Benjamin, or Kracauer, as I have noted, saw film as both repressive and potentially useful for socialist mobilisation. For bourgeois or right-wing critics, while film's direct appeal to the primitive sensibilities of the working class and other 'less developed' strata exacerbated degenerative tendencies, it also held out a pedagogical and regenerative promise that they hoped to harness in the service of progress and hygiene. These critics thus sought to respond both to the threats and the possibilities with 'negative' and 'positive' interventions that matched the common social hygienic approaches that we saw in the previous chapter. Thus, they sought on the one hand to regulate and censor new media, a tendency especially evident in the fight against 'dirt and filth' (*Schund und Schmutz*) in all forms of mass culture, and on the other to produce uplifting film. This latter desire was particularly influential in shaping the documentary film movement that grew to significant proportions over the course of the Weimar period.

This chapter will thus begin by looking at how photography and film's roles in the transformation of bodies and subjectivities were conceptualised, especially amongst the avant-garde. These new forms of vision were often given an explicitly political character that was directly identified with socialism, although they retained an often abstract utopianism divorced from material social relations. In the second section, I will turn to the question of the audience or spectator as a way of exploring these social and cultural relations. If there was a *homo cinemanticus*, this new person was embodied more as spectator or consumer

14 Wirth 1922, p. 2.

15 Wirth 1922, p. 2.

than cinematic producer. It was as spectators as well that social hygienic fears around 'primitive' audiences of workers, women, and children were directed; gender, I argue here, played an especially important role in shaping conceptions of the audience. In the third section, I look more concretely at the ways in which photography, film, and other mass media came to play such a prominent role in practices of social hygienic regulation and control. This included both restrictive interventions such as censorship or audience regulation, and the attempts by reformers to produce 'healthy' audiences through documentary film, hygiene exhibitions, and other forms of cultural production.

These interventions were all attempts to remake and regenerate the *Volkskörper*, a project that, as I have argued in earlier chapters, was rooted deeply in ideas of race. The concluding section of this chapter will take up this perspective through an exploration of the specific ways in which new media, photography in particular, played prominent roles in configuring ideas of race. Indeed, over the course of the Weimar period practices of social hygiene were shaped ever more strongly by a eugenics grounded in racial science, an area of study that buttressed the growing strength of the right and the radical right. Racial science, I will argue, was driven by a kind of pedagogy of vision that sought to produce a particular kind of new embodied subject. Indeed, all of the practices that I detail in this chapter can be thought of as forms of visual pedagogy, practices that implicitly or explicitly worked to remake bodies and subjectivities in new ways, with right-wing racial science seeking to produce a racial 'photo-eye'. The success of the right in this respect was an important and often under-appreciated aspect of their broader containment of the working-class movement. As I will detail in the next chapter, the left offered alternative cultural forms that sought to undo these gains by the right, but ultimately these could only offer limited forms of resistance to the broad-based projects of cultural hygiene traced here.

5.2 The Photo-Eye: New Modes of Vision

The argument that photography and film had produced a fundamental transformation in vision and subjectivity was given its most influential expression by László Moholy-Nagy. Moholy-Nagy wrote extensively on photography and film, was an innovator in the field of photography itself, and, especially as an instructor at the Bauhaus from 1923 to 1928, was deeply involved in education.¹⁶

16 Hight 1995.

He was one of a number of Hungarians who had emigrated to Germany – many in the aftermath of their participation in the Hungarian Soviet Republic – who had a profound influence on the culture and politics of the Weimar period. (This group includes Georg Lukács.) Moholy-Nagy was fascinated by the political implications of new technologies, but even more so by how they enabled new forms of perception that, he believed, could overcome the fragmenting and alienating character of modern life. His utopian socialism was thus rooted in a sense of the transformative power of new media.

In the early 1920s Moholy-Nagy played an important role in Constructivist projects that sought to yoke artistic experimentation to social and political transformation. As with many other radicals, Moholy-Nagy was influenced by the example of the Proletkult in Russia, arguing in a 1923 manifesto written with a number of other radical Hungarian artists that: '[i]n order to bring about a communist society, we artists must fight alongside the proletariat, and must subordinate our individual interests to those of the proletariat. We think that this is possible only within the communist party, by working in co-operation with the proletariat'.¹⁷

Moholy-Nagy only intermittently held to this notion of the subordination of art to political struggle. The previous year, in an essay on 'Constructivism and the Proletariat', he had argued that constructivist art in fact transcended class and class politics. Constructivism is

neither proletarian nor capitalist. Constructivism is primordial, without class and without ancestor. It expresses the pure form of nature, the direct color, the spatial element not distorted by utilitarian motifs.

'It is the machine', he continued, 'that woke up the proletariat... This is our century – technology, machine, socialism. Make your peace with it. Shoulder its task'.¹⁸

Moholy-Nagy's Constructivism was thus contradictory in its foundational principles: art was subordinated to political struggle, but it simultaneously transcended historical specificity. As bearer of the machinic spirit evoked in the passage above, Constructivism thus integrated artistic innovation with class struggle, but by 1932 he had arguably given art a more fundamental role in social transformation:

¹⁷ Ernő Kállai, Alfréd Kemény, László Moholy-Nagy, and László Péri, 'Manifesto', in Passuth 1985, p. 288.

¹⁸ 'Constructivism and the Proletariat', in Kostelanetz 1970, p. 185.

The class struggle offers a way, a very effective way, of eliminating the mistakes of the capitalist system, thereby improving the organic conditions of life. But there are other ways as well, which are less conscious, but which have as their aim to inform man – not so much through his intellect as through experience (the five senses) – about what he will need to rebuild his life after the partial or total collapse of the present system.

Art is that unconscious preparation, the education of man's subconscious.¹⁹

This passage is remarkable for where it locates social and individual transformation. Socialism is merely the elimination of capitalism's 'mistakes', a rather limited view of revolutionary change. True transformation is that brought about in human subjectivity by art. His own practice sought to develop this vanguardist role for art, with photography and film playing a leading role in his visual pedagogies.

Moholy-Nagy was not the only one who tended to grant a determining role to technology in thinking through questions of aesthetics and politics. The film theorist Béla Balázs also argued in *The Spirit of Film* (1930) that with the advent of the new medium, '[a] new human organ has developed'.²⁰ Balázs had been close to Lukács in the early 1920s, and was sympathetic to the romantic anti-capitalism often associated with the latter.²¹ He argued that film provided the medium for overcoming the fragmentation and alienation of modern life.

It is in the nature of the technology that film has abolished the distance between the spectator and the self-contained world of art... Film is the art of seeing. It is thus the art of concretion. As its inner destiny, film resists the murderous abstraction characteristic of the spirit of capitalism that makes things into commodities, values into prices, and people into impersonal labour power.²²

19 László Moholy-Nagy, 'Painting and Photography', in Passuth 1985, p. 319.

20 Balázs 2001, p. 10.

21 David Bathrick argues that Balázs had more in common with Ernst Bloch, especially in remaining attuned to the ways in which the right mobilised through irrational and mythical traditions. Balázs's emphasis on the de-alienating potential of film speaks to this vitalist orientation (1992, pp. 26–27). This also, perhaps, helps explain his work as screenwriter on Leni Riefenstahl's radical nationalist mountain film *The Blue Light*, which drew on vitalist approaches for a radical right aesthetic. On Balázs's extensive screenwriting, see Czako 1992.

22 Balázs 2001, pp. 166–67.

Balázs's notion of a new 'human organ' reflected the similarities of his and Moholy-Nagy's approaches, the latter also conceiving of the impact of new media in terms of a physiological and psychological transformation. Moholy-Nagy's 1925 book *Painting, Photography, Film*, the eighth volume of the Bauhaus book series that he was central in organising, developed this argument in its most sustained form. Indeed, the design of the book itself reflected his desire to instigate a transformation in perception. Moholy-Nagy had worked out a range of typographical innovations that he combined with photography and designated as 'typo-photo'.²³ These design elements, which included the use of different fonts and text sizes in an often non-linear layout, were reflected not only in *Painting, Photography, Film*, but also in other books in the series. These innovations were intended to reflect and inflect modern forms of perception. The book itself narrated the development of the three titular media as a kind of dialectical progression. Each successive medium, Moholy-Nagy argued, supplanted its predecessor, in the process also liberating the earlier medium and freeing up new creative possibilities. Photography thus supplanted painting in objectively representing the external world, but this freed the latter for 'absolute painting', a quasi-biological, colour-based form of expression exemplified by Cubist experiments, as well as the work of Malevich.²⁴

By taking up painting's task, photography, in turn, transformed the meaning of objective vision. For Moholy-Nagy, '*the photographic camera can either complete or supplement our optical instrument, the eye*'.²⁵ As Mia Fineman argues, Moholy-Nagy was not alone in seeing photography as a prosthetic technology that promised a radical bodily and perceptual regeneration.²⁶ He considered this regeneration to be in its infancy, however:

23 For example, in 'The New Typography' from 1923, Moholy argued that '[t]he new typography is a simultaneous experience of vision and communication', a simultaneity that matched emergent modern consciousness and social forms. Photography was especially crucial here as '[t]he objectivity of photography liberates the receptive reader from the crutches of the author's personal idiosyncrasies and forces him into the formation of his own opinion' (in Kostelanetz 1970, pp. 75–76).

24 Moholy 1967, pp. 9–15. 'Absolute painting' finds its counterpart in 'absolute film', which, as I will discuss shortly, was propounded by a range of avant-garde filmmakers, and was canonised through the film programme of the same name put on in May 1925 in Berlin by the *Novembergruppe*.

25 Moholy 1967, p. 28.

26 Fineman 1999, pp. 88–89, 108–114.

the total result to date amounts to little more than a visual encyclopaedic achievement. This is not enough. We wish to **produce** systematically since it is important for life that we create *new relationships*.²⁷

In this sense, then, Moholy-Nagy's project represented more than a passive technological determinism, it expressed an interventionist desire to build or produce new relationships that he shared with his Bauhaus colleagues. As he argued elsewhere of this radical pedagogical practice,

mind and eye feverishly acquire new dimensions of vision for which today photography and film already offer the grounding and reality. Tomorrow the details. Today, the training of vision.²⁸

The new possibilities opened up by photography and film were expressive of a vitalist dynamism that he argued needed to replace the hitherto dominant static principle. In a 1922 article written with Alfréd Kamény, he proclaimed that

vital construction is the embodiment of life and the principle of all human and cosmic development . . . Carried further, the dynamic single-construction leads to the DYNAMIC-CONSTRUCTIVE ENERGY-SYSTEM, with the beholder, hitherto receptive in his contemplation of art-works, undergoing a greater heightening of his powers than ever before and actually becoming an active factor in the play of forces.²⁹

Because film produced movement it powerfully captured this dynamic quality. The Constructivist Hans Richter likewise identified this characteristic of film in highlighting the difficulty of writing on the new medium. 'To show something of film in a book is difficult, as it lacks movement'.³⁰ Richter's solution was to simply reproduce images of filmstrips. For Moholy-Nagy, while film's

27 Moholy 1967, pp. 28–29.

28 'geradlinigkeit des geistes – umwege der technik', in Moholy 1991, p. 297. The article originally appeared in the Bauhaus journal in 1926, with the lower-case letters of the title another rationalising typographical innovation promoted by Moholy-Nagy (on these innovations, see Moholy-Nagy's article 'Bauhaus and Typography', in Kostelanetz 1970, pp. 76–77).

29 László Moholy-Nagy and Alfréd Kemény, 'Dynamic-Constructive Energy-System', in Kostelanetz 1970, p. 29.

30 Richter 1968, p. 6.

dynamism was unique, it also had a recursive impact on older media. Thus, much as the development of photography had liberated painting, innovations like typo-photo allowed for film's dynamic principle to be expressed in the old media of print and photography as well.

Of the newly liberated possibilities open to photography, one of the most significant was photomontage. Moholy-Nagy himself experimented with the technique, which his follower Franz Roh argued 'is based on a deep need of human imagination'.³¹ Roh had in mind Dadaist and futurist experiments here, but stressed that advertisers and the producers of mass visual culture also tapped into this need. While he himself produced photomontages, Moholy-Nagy's major photographic innovation came with what he called 'photograms'. This involved the production of images by placing objects directly on the photographic plate or paper. He argued that this process enabled the exploration of the purer properties of light, and opened up forms of representation and perception unavailable to the naked eye. Photograms thus acted as a bridge between painting and photography or film, performing the prosthetic function of enhancing vision.³² Since the time of Daguerre, Moholy-Nagy argued, photography had not changed in its 'copying of nature by means of the photographic camera and the mechanical reproduction of perspective... The proper utilization of the plate itself would have brought to light phenomena imperceptible to the human eye and made visible only by means of the photographic apparatus, thus perfecting the eye by means of photography'.³³

The possibilities for a transformed vision, a perfected eye, were evident in a number of other new technologies or uses of photography. In an essay from 1932, Moholy-Nagy laid out eight new forms of vision and their related methods of image production: abstract seeing (photogram); exact seeing (reportage); rapid seeing (snapshots); slow seeing (prolonged exposures); intensified seeing (micro-photography and filter photography); penetrative seeing (x-rays, radiography); simultaneous seeing (photomontage); and distorted seeing (prisms, lenses, manipulation of negative).³⁴ Many of these techniques were used by Moholy-Nagy himself and by others associated with the Bauhaus or the *neue*

31 'Mechanism and Expression: The Essence and Value of Photography', in Roh and Tschichold 1973, p. 18. Roh published a book of Moholy-Nagy's photographs, and a number of the images in this book, *Photo-Eye*, were drawn from the 1929 *Film und Foto* exhibition in Stuttgart on which Moholy-Nagy worked.

32 Hoormann 2003, pp. 138–153.

33 'Light – A Medium of Plastic Expression', in Kostelanetz 1970, p. 117.

34 'A New Instrument of Vision' [originally written in 1932, published in 1936], in Kostelanetz 1970, pp. 52–53.

Sachlichkeit, and were understood as opening up new perceptions of nature. In one sense, new media enabled a freedom from nature, with Richter arguing that, for art, '[b]eing tied to nature is a constriction'.³⁵ Thus, by penetrating more deeply into nature, these new forms of vision enabled its transcendence. Rudolf Kurtz contended that film thereby produced a kind of second nature.

Of all forms of art, film appears least artistic and most nature-like. Its essential medium, photography, already appears fundamentally non-artistic.

It is a reversal of the state of things.³⁶

The notion of a new vision was profoundly ambivalent, however, as the transcendence of nature through radical technological innovation also often involved the naturalisation of new forms of vision, even if the conception of nature that resulted was malleable. This new vision was deeply rooted in the new nature of modern, urban life. The most famous depiction of the city in this vein came in Walter Ruttmann's *Berlin, Symphony of a Great City*. Bracketed by his own experiments in abstract or absolute film, Ruttmann's camera traced the rhythms of urban life, constructing the city as a living, breathing entity. In so doing, he renaturalised the urban landscape, literally in his juxtapositions of animals and people, and figuratively through the presentation of the city's rhythms as self-generating, independent of any concrete social relations.

The term 'absolute film' is often associated with Ruttmann, although less so *Berlin, Symphony*. Absolute film was established as a genre through a film night by that name organised by the *Novembergruppe* in May 1925. Ruttmann's *Opus II*, *III*, and *IV* were shown, alongside films by Hans Richter, Viking Eggeling, and others working in Germany; Fernand Léger's *Ballet Mécanique* and René Clair's *Entr'acte* were also part of the programme. The German contributions in particular tended to involve the use of geometrical shapes moving, often quasi-organically, in musical time. While the sequences of everyday urban life that made up *Berlin, Symphony* involved a more recognisable photographic realism, Ruttmann there made use of the principles of montage to produce a sense of the city that was abstract and dynamic, seeking to generate an experience through the new medium that was commensurate with emerging modes of urban visuality and perception.

35 Richter 1968, p. 33.

36 Kurtz 1926, p. 51.

For Rudolf Kurtz, writing the following year, the absolute film of Ruttmann, Richter, and Eggeling represented an expansion of the potential that had been opened up in Expressionist film as well as a fulfilment of the demands of art.

At the end point of absolute art is thus a psychological effect that, at the contemporary stage, is similar to that of traditional art. However, it is not only triggered by the differentiated processes of the fully developed soul, but through the simple natural compulsion of psycho-physical connection. Rhythm – originally through the bodily sensations of pulse and heartbeat, through the natural sequences of the most primitive work activities – may have been quasi-biologically based at the spiritual level. That the depletion of fundamental forms [*Formelemente*] induced a depletion of spiritual life is not to be deduced as a matter of principle from the actual condition of absolute art.³⁷

Kurtz's vision of absolute art is thus primitivist in its orientation, evoking 'fundamental forms' and a natural rhythm rooted in primitive work. It is in this sense that it transcends the classical sense of art as a separate sphere, and is based in part on the influence of the arts and crafts movement on absolute film. The psycho-physical impact that he notes here demonstrates the extent to which, for these radical critics and filmmakers, film enabled a fundamental bodily and subjective transformation.

Béla Balázs likewise argued that absolute film transcended the merely aesthetic, and even the subjectivity of the human condition. Documentary as much as abstract film could have these 'absolute' qualities.³⁸ As Hanno Loewy argues, '[f]or Balázs, "absolute film" is less a category than a thought-figure suitable to sharply indicate the fundamental structures of the new medium. The form, which is itself content, is "nothingness"'.³⁹ This understanding of absolute film opened up possibilities beyond abstract film, a broadening of the concept that reflected the strong desire on the part of many film activists to develop absolute film as a radical political aesthetic accessible beyond the narrow confines of the avant-garde. The 1929 *Film und Foto* exhibit in Stuttgart in which Richter played a major role was a moment where such a breakthrough into a wider relevance may have been possible, as Malte Hagener argues. While the event saw absolute film reach a much wider audience, a variety of factors,

37 Kurtz 1926, p. 94.

38 Balázs 2001, pp. 85–106.

39 Loewy 2003, p. 156.

from the advent of sound film to the deteriorating political climate, meant that any momentum in this respect was largely lost.⁴⁰

The politics of absolute film was often rather obscure, especially in terms of engaging working-class audiences, although in some instances, such as Richter's *Ghosts Before Breakfast* mentioned in the third chapter, the new aesthetic enabled a powerful critique of alienated social relations. As Benjamin argued, the key danger was in avoiding the aestheticisation and naturalisation of social relations. He found the *Neue Sachlichkeit* especially guilty in this respect. The movement 'has succeeded in transforming even abject poverty – by apprehending it in a fashionably perfected manner – into an object of enjoyment'.⁴¹ Albert Renger-Patzsch's photobook *The World is Beautiful* exemplified this trend, Benjamin suggested, with the aestheticising implication of the title showing how far he had succumbed to the commercial pull of the medium.⁴² Benjamin argued that Moholy-Nagy was an exception in this respect as he retained a dialectical sense of the relationship of photography to painting and earlier forms of art.⁴³ In Benjamin's view, by representing the world as beautiful many of these new approaches sought to recover older aesthetic ideals, thereby renaturalising an alienated social order and abolishing the dialectical tension that, in its critical forms, photography and film could produce. As Benjamin noted, the danger was always that any potential political charge generated by these new media theories and practices risked dissipating into the affirmative culture of advertising. Indeed, filmmakers like Ruttmann and his frequent collaborator Lotte Lendendorff produced numerous advertising shorts that drew on their experiments in absolute film.

Despite these dangers, Benjamin shared the belief that photography offered new possibilities of vision.

Photography, with its devices of slow motion and enlargement, reveals the secret. It is through photography that we first discover the existence of this optical unconscious, just as we discover the instinctual unconscious through psychoanalysis. Details of structure, cellular tissue, with which technology and medicine are normally concerned – all this is, in

40 Hagener 2007, pp. 34–35; 143–45.

41 'The Author as Producer', in Benjamin 1999b, p. 775.

42 'Little History of Photography', in Benjamin 1999b, p. 526. It should be noted that Renger-Patzsch initially proposed the title *Things* for the book, with the publisher settling on *The World is Beautiful*; for Benjamin, however, the title was merely symptomatic of its aesthetic orientation.

43 'Little History of Photography', in Benjamin 1999b, p. 523.

its origins, more native to the camera than the atmospheric landscape or the soulful portrait.⁴⁴

Here is the psycho-physical dimension of photography highlighted by Kurtz, read through a more Freudian lens. As with Freud, for Benjamin psychological processes are simultaneously somatic, with the camera's penetrating of the material body linked directly to the unconscious. However, Benjamin insistently read this body in its imbrications in capitalist social relations. Thus, the camera in his account serves as a diagnostic tool uncovering the optical unconscious of capitalist modernity.

Despite Benjamin's own endorsement of Moholy-Nagy, it is important to note the subtle but distinct differences between their respective understandings of photography and film. As we saw with Moholy-Nagy's conception of 'socialism', his pedagogical project was directed primarily at the transformation of the senses, not the social order. Thus, in 1922 he argued that art could train human receptive organs: '[t]he structure of man is the synthesis of all his functional apparatuses, i.e. man will be most perfect if those functional apparatuses – his cells as well as the most sophisticated organs – are trained to the limit of their capacity'.⁴⁵ Moholy-Nagy verges on a utopian Taylorism here, the body rendered as an efficient machine through the interventions of the avant-garde camera; there is no optical unconscious to be explored. Tellingly, he frames this techno-socialism as a matter of health. In *Painting, Photography, Film* he argues that '[t]he unambiguousness of the real, the truth in the everyday situation is there for all social strata (*Schichten*). **The hygiene of the optical, the health of the visible is slowly filtering through.**'⁴⁶ The fascination that Moholy-Nagy and others demonstrated for x-rays and other new medical and scientific imaging technologies was thus arguably not simply because of the new form of vision that they enabled, but was also because they carried the sheen of a medicalising hygiene.

44 'Little History of Photography', in Benjamin 1999b, pp. 510–12.

45 'Produktion-Reproduktion', in Moholy-Nagy 1991, p. 294. In Balázs's account, it is film that performs this pedagogical function. In discussing Soviet montage, for example, he argues that the tempo of the images would have been difficult to comprehend only ten years earlier, but 'we have now learned to see more quickly' (Balázs 2001, p. 50).

46 Moholy-Nagy 1967, p. 38. He later made a similar if more blunt point about the positive impact of sound film. 'The slower rhythm of sound film montage appears to me to be far *more healthy* from a physiological point of view, since it tires the eye far less than the staccato montage of the silent film' ('Supplementary Remarks on the Sound and Color Film' [1936], in Kostelanetz 1970, p. 141).

Unsurprisingly, given his antipathy towards formal artistic experimentation, Georg Lukács had warned of the dangers of film already in 1913, highlighting precisely those dimensions of the medium that were celebrated by the avant-garde – its bodily impact and its qualities of motion and rhythm. Film, he argued in an essay on the aesthetics of the medium, ‘is movement itself, eternal mutability, the never-resting change of things’.⁴⁷ For Lukács, these levelling qualities contrasted negatively with the power of theatre. Where theatre presented live human beings as profoundly present in time and space, film could only offer non-organic serialised actions, fantasies unrelated to material being. With film, ‘[m]an has lost his *soul*, but in exchange has gained his *body*’.⁴⁸ This bodily dimension of film is precisely the point of its downfall, the marker of a coarse and primitive entertainment. ‘The *child*, which inhabits all of us, is released and becomes the master of the audience’s psyche’.⁴⁹ Against the emancipatory primitivism celebrated by the avant-garde, we have an infantilising primitive medium. The bodily principle blocks the spiritual, prefiguring the flight from the body that, as we saw in the third chapter, characterised Lukács’s subsequent work.

More commonly, though, Marxists in the period focused their critique on the reactionary dangers of mass consumer culture rather than on film as a medium. A key element of this danger was the extent to which mass culture abstracted from social relations, in particular relations of production. The way in which new photographic practices served these reactionary interests was especially evident in more conservative works like E.O. Hoppé’s photo book *German Labour*. This collection aestheticises and naturalises capitalist social relations even more directly and explicitly than in the work of Renger-Patzsch. The photographs in the book celebrate capital rather than labour, with the machine presented as the locus of productive activity.⁵⁰ The human labour

47 Lukács 1981, p. 3.

48 Lukács 1981, p. 3. Interestingly, in his 1919 account of his life in film, the director Max Mack made precisely this argument about the visual basis of acting talent. Film, like photography, ‘doesn’t bring the beautiful soul to the screen, only the material body, the external’ (1919, p. 21).

49 Lukács 1981, pp. 3–4. It should be noted that Lukács does acknowledge that film has some creative potential, but that it fails in the face of its own possibilities and those presented by theatre. The evocation of the child here was of a piece with primitivist ideas that, as we saw in the last chapter, conflated ontogenetic and phylogenetic development.

50 Hoppé 1930. Given its release date as the Depression was taking hold and unemployment soaring, the book was rather optimistically subtitled ‘images from the resurgence of Germany’.

congealed in the machines is thus abstracted from the social conditions of production, with the machines celebrated as the culmination of modern development. Not only does the book aestheticise machine production, it also, as the title suggests, inscribes labour into a national(ist) frame. The book thus fits seamlessly with social hygienic ideas of the *Volkskörper* that, as we have seen, revolved around the constitution of a rationalised and machinic labour force. Bruno Bürgel's introduction to the book reinforces the fetishisation of industrial machinery in the images. 'You are simultaneously beauty and misery, Labour. Source of all progress, all culture!'⁵¹ Labour is entirely subordinated to the machine: '[y]ou are simultaneously victor and vanquished, man of the machine age!'⁵² The logic here is similar to that which we saw in the second chapter in the work of Ernst Jünger and others of the radical right, the human becoming inseparable from a regimented machine being.

This approach to technology was reflected in the case of Hoppé's book by a celebration of the possibilities of new media technologies that differed from the more nostalgic conservatism that we saw in Stapel's comments at the beginning of the chapter. Indeed, some on the radical right celebrated the power of the new media in ways that echoed the fascination of the avant-garde. Jünger, for example, displayed a subtle understanding of the far-reaching impact of the new media. For Jünger, as we saw in the second chapter, photography and film could play a potentially crucial role in the development of the state of 'total mobilisation' that was at the heart of his political project. Thus, in *Copse* 125 he suggests:

[Film] would be an admirable means of enhancing the modern battlefields. To turn away from this theme or to veil it is already a sign of inward weakness. Gigantic films with a wealth of resources spent upon them, and shown nightly to millions during the only hours of the day they can call their own, would have an invaluable influence. Moral and aesthetic compunction has no place here. The film is a problem of power and to be valued as such ... there must be a light hand on the reins. The surest influences are those that afford pleasure and are otherwise unnoticeable ... It is painful to others beside the man in the street to run against schemes of education in places where he goes to amuse himself.⁵³

51 Bruno Bürgel, 'Das Hohelied der Arbeit', in Hoppé 1930, pp. 5–6.

52 Bruno Bürgel, 'Das Hohelied der Arbeit', in Hoppé 1930, p. 6.

53 Jünger 1930a, pp. 200–1.

Jünger's account here displays a subtlety that many conservative critics lacked. The cultural conservative rejection of mass culture as a travesty of art missed the points Jünger highlights: the importance of new media for leisure time, and the centrality of amusement for consumers. Compared to Lukács, with his rather dour rejection of film's bodily qualities, Jünger's account offers a more nuanced understanding of the pleasures of mass culture, but also of its value in integrating the mass of the population into the cultural logic of capital. Unsurprisingly, for Jünger the true value of new visual technologies lay on the battlefields where, as we have seen, the new machinic man emerged. For Jünger, new visual technologies were 'instruments of a technological consciousness'⁵⁴ that were bound up with the emergence of the Worker as a new social type.

Despite the suspicion that traditional conservatives tended to feel towards film and photography, many did enlist the new media in projects of aesthetic regeneration. Photography notably took on a crucial role in (re-)capturing a national or racial essence. As I will discuss later in the chapter, this was evident in the extensive use of photography in racial science, but the new medium was also used to produce a nostalgic *völkisch* nationalism. Erna Lendvai-Dircksen's 1932 photobook *The Face of the German People* (*Das Deutsche Volksgesicht*) is perhaps the most famous example of this tendency. If avant-garde experiments sought to evoke the new face of the city, Lendvai-Dircksen's compendium of rural physiognomies provided its antithesis. By 1932 she had become an accomplished photographer, although her greatest successes came during the Nazi period, becoming the main photographer for the Nazi eugenic journal *Volk und Rasse*. *The Face of the German People* sought to reproduce an auratic national essence through the depiction of the lined and worn faces of farmers and other rural dwellers.

The brief accounts accompanying the photographs in Lendvai-Dircksen's book stressed the degenerative impacts of urban life, with the photographs acting as a therapeutic medium warding off these threats. Thus, the comment accompanying the portrait of a poor Frisian man: '[h]e speaks old Frisian: we don't understand each other. Mistrust is apparent in his eyes that narrow at the Berlin accent'.⁵⁵ The fact that even she, so sympathetic to their way of life, is treated with mistrust underlines the fundamental difference between the urban and rural. The urban threat is especially evident in a fractured gendered order that Lendvai-Dircksen seeks to repair. An image of a farmer from the

54 'Krieg und Lichtbild', in Jünger 1930b, p. 10.

55 Lendvai-Dircksen 1934, p. 30.

island of Föhr is subtitled 'the mother', and the comment presents her as a response to modern feminism.

Nothing seeped through to her about the problems of the woman's question. She would hardly be affected by that in any case. Because she holds the natural place of woman: she is the heart of the family, with all the duties, but all the rights as well.⁵⁶

It was this naturalised essence of the German people that photography, so often associated with the ephemeral productions of mass culture, could recapture, healing in the process the fragmented social order.

This nostalgic orientation was also evident in Max Jungnickel's 1932 work, *People and Fatherland* (*Volk und Vaterland*). Jungnickel drew on many of the themes dear to Jünger, with the *Freikorps* and other struggles against the left playing a key role in his narrative of the German people, but rather than stressing the machine, he situates this in a longer history of the soil. Modern life, what he derisively calls 'asphalt wisdom',⁵⁷ destroys the older values of the craftsman and the soil. Jungnickel celebrates new German industrialists, but both the text and photographs in his book return consistently to these older values and people. Notably, among the many photographs that he reproduces are a number from Renger-Patzsch.

One anecdote captures Jungnickel's reworking of photography as a medium that touches the primordial soul. He describes meeting a man on a train who shows him a photo of his small, plain house in front of which he, his wife, five sons, and four daughters all stand.

The image itself is marked, as if fingers had frequently traced over it, rough, intrusive fingers. But as I looked at the image, it seems as though out of it, as if out of a secret source, a deep stillness and bliss flows into my soul. It is arguably the word homeland [*Heimat*] that has been released from a lost heart and has now become trapped in everything. When I turn around, I see that the man is also lost in thought looking at the photograph, at the image, that he has surely seen every morning. And now he closes the chest and lifts it up again into the luggage rack, sitting back firmly in his seat as if transfigured.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Lendvai-Dirksen 1934, p. 18.

⁵⁷ Jungnickel 1932, p. 31.

⁵⁸ Jungnickel 1932, pp. 14–15.

As with Lendvai-Dircksen's photographs, this one too is an expression of rooted being, but in a somewhat different way. The photograph itself is old and worn, an object of use that bears the marks of its significance. It is no longer simply a representation, and especially not one shaped by its reproducibility. It is precisely its materiality, its uniqueness and its recurrent use, that Jungnickel suggests gives it an auratic quality. It is deeply personal, speaking to the man on the train, but its textures communicate to Jungnickel as well; seeing it, he becomes calm. The photograph is the medium by which the rooted simplicity of the true German and the patriarchal family is inscribed in the homeland (*Heimat*).

While aesthetically and politically retrograde, Jungnickel's reading of photography is interesting in that it foregrounds the materiality of the medium and its integration into the practices of everyday life. This is a snapshot, an object of use. Indeed, in the overheated rhetoric of the avant-garde, with its notions of technologically mediated transformation, the materiality of the medium and especially the embodied and situated nature of the audience were often lost. As Ernst Bloch noted frequently, the right was often far more carefully attuned than the left to the power of this kind of mythical thinking, and specifically to the ways in which it activated a visceral response that could be channelled politically.⁵⁹ Certainly, one might argue that it was here that the avant-garde ran into its greatest difficulties. The optimistic progressivism that tended to underlie their conceptions of the new media in many respects failed to inspire in the face of the nationalist fantasies of the right. These latter provided a comforting image of solidity to bourgeois and petty-bourgeois audiences faced with the recurring crises of the Weimar period. But, while it is important to note the extent to which some on the right developed a critical photographic and filmic practice in their search to remake the *Volkskörper*, many bourgeois commentators remained highly sceptical, seeing the new media as a threat to the hygiene of that body. If the avant-garde sought an optical hygiene through new technologies, in the next two sections I will look more closely at how social hygienic practices more broadly turned to audiences and new media practices in attempting to shore up the health of the *Volkskörper*.

59 See especially Bloch 1990.

5.3 The Primitive Spectator: Race, Gender, Class, and the Weimar Audience

Moholy-Nagy's argument that new visual technologies produce new subjectivities relied on a relatively undertheorised conception of the spectator. Given his tendency to abstract from concrete social relations, it is not surprising that the transformed viewer that he describes is generic. In discussing class, for example, Moholy-Nagy insists that while changes in perception may promote changes in class society, perception itself is largely independent of class relations or position. This universalising approach to the spectator is in stark contrast (perhaps deliberately so) to the profound concerns expressed in debates over film spectatorship in the Weimar period that stressed the impact of new media on groups viewed as vulnerable, in particular youth, women, and the working class. While these audiences were consumers subject to the blandishments of market-driven media firms, they were simultaneously considered as 'at risk' groups to be regulated according to the dictates of social and racial hygiene. The audience was thus both the source of revenue for the culture industry and an object of profound anxiety.

For a host of critics, theorists, and filmmakers, the audience, and especially the audience for mass commercial films, was conceptualised above all as a *primitive* audience. Audiences of women, youth, and the working class were seen as naïve and at risk of negative influences. The logic here mirrored that of primitivism, but the values ascribed to the primitive were reversed. While audiences were the target of social hygienic concern, however, film itself was built on a fascination with the non-European primitive, a perspective that cemented film's role in mediating practices of embodiment and subjectivity. As Assenka Oksiloff argues, from its inception film sought out 'primitive' bodies, the camera travelling the globe to capture what European and American filmmakers considered 'exotic'.⁶⁰ Especially prominent in this regard were anthropologists (both professional and amateur) who produced films in the early 1900s at the crossroads of the scientific and the popular. This was the terrain of what Fatimah Tobing Rony calls 'ethnographic cinema', by which she means a broad range of popular and specialised films that took the racialised indigenous subject as its focus.⁶¹ These films centred on the body. As Oksiloff argues, '[i]t is as

60 Oksiloff 2001.

61 Rony 1996, pp. 6–9. MacDougall 2009, pp. 57–58 argues that the period between the two world wars was characterised by a very limited use of photography and especially film in anthropology proper, in part a function of the shift from collecting to fieldwork as the overarching anthropological approach. However, as Rony argues, ethnographic approaches

if, precisely when “modern” bodies lose their legitimacy as cognizable autonomous objects, the primitive body steps in to ensure the persistence of an older visual regime. The primitive body as visualized by German anthropology and by popularized cinematic visions of non-Westerners provided a stronghold against the impinging forces of modernist subjective vision.⁶²

This ethnographic spirit infused Weimar film theory as well as practice. Béla Balázs's *The Spirit of Film*, for example, begins by describing film theory as akin to Columbus' journey of discovery. In this sense film itself represents a new and undiscovered continent with the film theorist cast in the role of an intrepid explorer.⁶³ There is thus a doubled notion of the primitive here, with film a new undiscovered land ripe for exploration and also a medium through which the exotic primitive could be represented. In addition to these two senses of the primitive, a third was also evident, as we have just seen: the primitive spectator. Beginning with descriptions of the mimetic relationship of audiences to film (cowering in the face of an onrushing train on screen, for example), film critics and theorists configured the audience, especially the audience of mass commercial films, as primitive. Even Benjamin invoked a version of this idea in 1927, arguing that Soviet film was faced by the fact that '[t]he mode of mental reception of the peasants is basically different from that of the urban masses . . . To expose such audiences to film and radio constitutes one of the most grandiose mass-psychological experiments ever undertaken in the gigantic laboratory that Russia has become'.⁶⁴

This conception of the audience took on many forms. Thus, in 1913 Walter Serner argued that the visual pleasure of film (*Schaulust*) involved the upsurge of a primal feeling, or more accurately a regression to a primitive mode of

infused a range of photographic and filmic practices, from the popular productions of the commercial film industry to the 'scientific' pursuits of eugenicists and racial theorists. Photography also continued to be used extensively in ethnographic museums and exhibitions. Thus, while photography and film may have been demoted in anthropological methodologies, if anything they gained greater prominence in this period in the broader culture. It is this broader set of practices that are captured by Rony's term.

62 Oksiloff 2001, p. 10.

63 Balázs 2001, p. 9. This example of Columbus was drawn from his 1924 book *Visible Man* (Balázs 2010, p. 3). It is important in this respect to stress the particular orientation he has to film theory which, as Hanno Loewy 2003 argues, 'means for Balázs not the semantics of a new language, but the unfolding of a symbolic scene, a ritual' (p. 140). Balázs had a broad interest in fables, his interest in film driven in part by its relationship to the fabulous; his evocations of Columbus in relation to film theory thus need to be read in part as a working through of the foundational fables of contemporary culture.

64 'On the Present Situation of Russian Film', in Benjamin 1999b, p. 14.

perception. Vision in his reading was a profoundly embodied, not abstract, sense.⁶⁵ We can also see this in Max Jungnickel's anecdote cited earlier. The man with the photograph is no sophisticated urban spectator, but rather is rooted in traditional social relations of family and country; he uses the photo as a kind of primitive totem through which he traces the boundaries and shape of his social order. Generally this primitive audience was conceived of as lower or working class, but not always. Balázs, for example, describes the owner of an estate in Ukraine, living far from the nearest town. He was educated, in touch with the outside world through newspapers and radio, but he had never encountered film until going to see a naïve Fairbanks movie. This left him completely unnerved. 'Our man stared with furrowed brow and intense concentration at the screen, trembling and weezing with agitation and the effort'.⁶⁶ While a child would have understood the film without effort, Balázs says, this man had not learned how to be a proper spectator.

The naïve or primitive audience could be given different valences or political meanings, but many critics shared a sense that this profoundly modern medium in fact produced a regression to an earlier stage of perception. In the case of Moholy-Nagy and others amongst the avant-garde, as we saw, this in fact meant a return to a purer and more profound form of vision. But, as with primitivism, this was premised on a fundamental hierarchy between the primitive and the modern, a distinction captured in whimsical fashion in an advertisement made by Walter Ruttmann, the director of *Berlin, Symphony of a Great City*, and Lotte Lendendorff for the electronics firm AEG. Produced through Julius Pinschewer's advertising agency, the cartoon ad hawked AEG's advanced radio equipment by invoking hoary primitivist stereotypes. We are presented with a caricatured black 'primitive' playing music. He sings the notes 'A-E-G', which are then carried on radio waves around an animated globe where a white German police officer comically tries to stop them. The officer cannot resist the music, however, and the ad ends with him sitting happily at home listening to the radio, the black musician magically appearing in the air above him.

The ad is a typical example of the use of primitivist and racist stereotypes in mass media (including exaggerated lips and other features of the black musician, and the association of the primitive with music). Technology mediates the relationship between the primitive and the modern, the ad drawing on the 'colonial nostalgia' that, as I have argued, was central to Weimar culture. The significance of the primitive in the ad goes further, however. The police officer

65 Serner 1978.

66 Balázs 2001, p. 10.

himself has his own 'primitive' moment. His farcical attempt to halt the incoming radio waves (he holds up his hand in typically authoritarian police fashion) demonstrates his own ignorance both of the functioning of the new medium, and of the potential power of the primitive expression that he seeks to block; AEG's technology thus transcends this primitivism, domesticating the music and technology and making it safe for consumption.

The depiction of the police officer pokes gentle fun at the authoritarian social hygienic response to new media, which was built on a fear of its impact on what it conceived of as primitive audiences. The danger was that the urban masses would lose themselves in the medium and thus threaten the boundaries of social order. Indeed, the idea of the loss of self, the complete identification of the viewer with the film, was a staple of primitivist notions of film. Again this danger was projected onto the primitives depicted in ethnographic cinema. Their distinguishing feature, commentator after commentator argued, was that primitives lacked even a sense of playing a role. In *The Spirit of Film*, for example, Balázs argues that ethnographic films like *Moana* (1926) (often called 'Negro films' [*Negerfilme*]), share a documentary quality with films depicting peasants and farmers as both deal with 'actors' who are free of any intentionality.

This naïve, child-like acting ability is found more often among exotic races. We see this in dramatised documentaries [*Kulturfilmen*] . . . It is no 'theatrical acting', but rather like the play of children: a trance-like state, a kind of daydream. Is this then art or nature? It is an in between state that, like a hallucination or dream, stands rather closer to nature.⁶⁷

Are *Moana* and other adventure films not, he asks, stories of a 'forgotten paradise . . . of his [Man's] confrontation with the dark mysteries of the universe, beyond the frontiers of life, at the only point where the class struggle is no more and nothing remains but the natural struggle'?⁶⁸ A 1928 review of *Moana* echoed this point, arguing that it captured the 'bodily and mimetic power of expression of the earth's Black inhabitants'.⁶⁹ Hans Schomburgk – one of the most prominent makers of ethnographic and adventure films set in Africa – likewise argued that in Liberia 'every child on the streets is a born actor, because they don't act, but are naturally without inhibitions, free, as God made them'.⁷⁰

67 Balázs 2001, pp. 24–25.

68 Balázs 2001, p. 76.

69 Quoted in Nagl 2009, p. 383.

70 Schomburgk 1930, p. 125.

Indeed, he claimed, '[t]he less the natives have come into contact with civilisation [*Kultur*], the better they are as film actors'.⁷¹

These seemingly approving comments are grounded on a profoundly racist notion of a natural, unconscious, immediate primitive body. At the same time, this bodily immediacy is reproduced in the medium of film itself. Thus, Rudolf Kurtz argues:

Of all forms of art, film appears the least artistic and most nature-like. Its essential medium, photography, already appears fundamentally non-artistic. It is a reversal of the state of things.⁷²

It is precisely in this reversal that film was both powerful and dangerous, extending the human sensorium but also threatening a dangerous regression to a primitive state. The power of film to transform vision was stressed by avant-garde critics like Hans Richter. He rejected a purely pedagogical conception of film, arguing that as entertainment, film allowed for the audience's bodily response, releasing a primal need. 'One cannot expect that people go to the cinema, for example, simply to be educated. The masses feel that the film theatre, when successful, is a relatively ideal means for the satisfaction of one of the most primitive and universal human needs: the exhibitionary need [*das Schaubedürfnis*]'.⁷³ What the primitive actors of ethnographic film could do naturally, film could allow the modern audience to access in mediated fashion.

When we take a closer look at ethnographic cinema, we can see immediately that the primitive moment was itself staged. That is, the primitive was a production of European fantasy. This was strongly evident in one of the most prominent ethnographic films of the period, F.W. Murnau's *Tabu* (1931). Written with the famed documentary filmmaker Robert Flaherty (*Nanook of the North*), *Tabu* was made a few years after Murnau had left Germany for Hollywood. It was filmed in the South Seas, the site of many German primitivist fantasies, and proved successful in the German market. The film's protagonists are a couple forced to flee their people when the woman, Reri, is selected to be a sacred virgin for a neighbouring people, meaning that any contact with her was now taboo. While they initially manage to escape, they are ultimately caught. Reri leaves in an attempt to save Matahi's life, but he swims after her boat and drowns trying to catch her.

⁷¹ Schomburgk 1931, p. 378.

⁷² Kurtz 1926, p. 51.

⁷³ Richter 1968, p. 46.

Murnau himself, much to Flaherty's dismay, staged many of the film's scenes according to the style of German painting, with the actors very deliberately coached in their 'spontaneous' primitivity. As the prominent critic Rudolf Arnheim perceptively noted in 1931, the film portrayed a 'Hollywood Tahiti'. 'The film people . . . show the islanders how it is supposed to look on a romantic South Seas island'.⁷⁴ However, it was not the artificiality of this supposedly primitive state that Arnheim found most objectionable. Rather, in a passage worth quoting at length, what was especially troubling was the way in which:

the ideology of bourgeois film production smuggles its way into even such a film, one that takes place at the other end of the earth, and how the naked wild man must make the westerners' national morality palatable to them. The islanders live carefree and happy, like the tuxedoed barons in our society films. Just as the general director in the film occasionally speaks on the telephone, wrinkled of brow, so that the viewer may get a picture of Business, the islander now and then picturesquely throws a spear, for the purpose of making his living; otherwise, he devotes himself to his beloved with flowers in his hair. The Economic appears only as a demonic motif, as when the sneaky Chinese barkeeper pulls out his IOU. Love revolts against the rules so that dramatic tension can be injected into the script, be it the taboo of the South Seas religion or the sacrament of Christian marriage; but here, as there, the law triumphs in a manner instructive to the populace, and the wrongdoer is bitten by sharks.⁷⁵

The primitive in this instance is in no way subversive or destabilising of social norms, serving instead to cement an insipidly bourgeois morality that matches commercial film production more broadly.

As Arnheim's argument suggests, the centrality of the primitive to both ethnographic film and film theory involved a displacement, a projection of metropolitan concerns outward. This was often the case in primitivist art as well, as we saw in the previous chapter. What Arnheim stresses, though, is that the primitive moment in the film served to efface social and economic relations, the melodramatic narrative displacing these social questions. As a morality

74 'Tabu', in Arnheim 1997, p. 167. He highlights especially the way in which silent film conventions, for example 'when an islander, in order to register shock, to great effect widens her eyes, opens her arms, and sinks back with slow ballet steps' (p. 167), are deployed in the film.

75 'Tabu' in Arnheim 1997, p. 167.

tale, then, the film has a pedagogical intent that matches that of other commercial films. If *Tabu* served to maintain colonial fantasies of radical racialised difference on the one hand, it simultaneously domesticated the primitive and placed it in the service of bourgeois morality on the other. It marked a desire for a state of nature in which, as Balázs uncritically proclaimed in the passage cited earlier, we witness a 'forgotten paradise' in which class struggle is transcended.

Behind this redeployment of the primitive was the view of the film audience itself as primitive, which indicated profound anxieties over the entry of working-class, female, and youth audiences onto the public stage. Writing in 1910, Alfred Döblin expressed these fears in pungent terms:

Inside the pitch-black, low-ceilinged space, a rectangular screen glares over a monster of an audience, a white eye fixating the mass with a monotonous gaze. Couples making-out in the background are carried away and withdraw their undisciplined fingers. Children wheezing with consumption quietly shake with the chills of evening fever; badly smelling workers with bulging eyes, women in musty clothes, heavily made-up prostitutes leaning forward, forgetting to adjust their scarves. Here you can see 'panem et circenses' fulfilled: spectacle as essential as bread, the bullfight as popular need.⁷⁶

Siegfried Kracauer remembered this early cinema in a similar way in his canonical 1947 history of Weimar film, *From Caligari to Hitler*:

During that whole era the film had the traits of a young street arab; it was an uneducated creature running wild among the lower strata of society... An attraction for young workers, salesgirls, the unemployed, loafers and social non-descripts, the movie theaters were in rather bad repute. They afforded a shelter to the poor, a refuge to sweethearts. Sometimes a crazy intellectual would stray into one.⁷⁷

The audience in these accounts is monstrous, working class, and female. Döblin's foregrounding of the figure of the prostitute is significant; as we saw in the previous chapter, she represented a gendered and classed subversion of propriety and public order and a locus of social hygienic regulation.

⁷⁶ Quoted in Petro 1989, p. 7.

⁷⁷ Kracauer 1947, p. 16.

Kracauer, an avid film viewer and critic, was arguably identifying himself with the 'crazy intellectual', but his writing in the Weimar period and after reflected these common prejudices, especially in terms of his gendered construction of the audience. It was a perspective that underlay his famous argument in *From Caligari to Hitler* that Weimar film developed authoritarian fantasies that set the stage for the rise of Hitler; his feminisation of the audience served to highlight its vulnerable passivity and susceptibility. Kracauer's Weimar writings were arguably more nuanced in their reading of the complex politics of film, but already during the 1920s he tended towards a passive and feminised conception of the mass cultural spectator. As he put it rather scathingly in relation to mass circulation magazines and newspapers in his 1927 essay on photography, '[t]he new fashions also must be disseminated, or else in the summer the beautiful girls will not know who they are'.⁷⁸ This feminisation of the mass cultural audience was widespread on the left, with critics thereby recuperating a working-class masculinity against 'degenerate' feminine influences. Thus, in a typical passage from 1927, the *Arbeiter-Jugend* (*Youth Worker*) described young women as 'watching sensational films in suburban cinemas, filling dance-halls and greedily devouring trashy literature'.⁷⁹

There was an element of truth to these depictions in the sense that film audiences at least were disproportionately made up of women.⁸⁰ A 1915 short film, *Frau Blechnudel Wants to Become a Film Actor*, satirised this predominantly female audience and its allegedly primitive mimetic relationship with the medium. The film begins with a matronly middle-aged woman reading a film magazine and dreaming of becoming a star. She writes to a director saying that she is 'a young, pretty, talented lady' who wants to act, ultimately ending up at a variety show audition. Squeezed into a small skirt and grotesquely made up, she dances absurdly on stage. Unable to distinguish between film and reality, Frau Blechnudel embodies the stereotypical female viewer seduced by the medium. Films themselves often depicted women as media consumers; even in a quasi-feminist film like *Girls in Uniform* one of the characters is driven on by her love for the film star Hans Albers, her locker covered in pictures cut out of magazines.

78 'Photography', in Kracauer 1995, p. 57.

79 Quoted in Benninghaus 2000, p. 46.

80 McCabe 2003, pp. 26–28; Loiperdinger 1996, pp. 43–45. Both authors use Emilie Altenloh's 1912 doctoral dissertation on cinema audiences in Mannheim, one of the only works from the period to systematically study audiences, as a key source for their discussions; this makes extrapolations to later years somewhat more tentative, however, and her findings are also not entirely reliable.

The construction of the feminine audience was deeply bound up with fears over the erosion of the middle-class values of the *Bildungsbürgertum*. Fritz Giese argued that the class-based suspicion directed at film audiences was even stronger in Germany than elsewhere; watching film was something that, at least in better society, 'one does not actually discuss aloud'.⁸¹ Film was not exclusively the domain of the lower classes, but cinema did promise an unprecedented access to culture beyond bourgeois control. The dangerous autonomy of the proletarian audience was exacerbated by the fact that, as Corey Ross argues, Weimar audiences were highly differentiated. Especially in the silent era, when films were cheaper to produce and screen, very different fare was presented to different audiences, and under very different conditions. The massive 'palaces of film' that have become a famous symbol of Weimar mass culture were far exceeded in number by smaller, much less ostentatious local theatres catering to working-class audiences.⁸² The advent of expensive sound film in the late 1920s and early 1930s made small-scale production and screening unviable, but even then the viewing landscape remained segmented. Thus, Ross argues, 'the widespread notion that the consumption of film by diverse social groups necessarily contributed to the gradual dissolution of milieu boundaries in the 1920s is not very convincing'.⁸³ Perceptions of the gendered and classed audiences thus fed off one another, stoking fears of the unruly, primitive audience.

Kracauer was one critic who, while inattentive to the gendered nature of debates over the audience, sought to ground his approach to film in a subtle and concrete analysis of changing class formations in the Weimar period. His reading of film stems from his discussion of what he called the 'mass orna-

81 Giese 1925, p. 51.

82 Ross 2006, pp. 170–72. In addition to the smaller commercial venues, avant-garde and politically radical film – categories that in some cases overlapped, but only to a degree – were fostered by the formation of alternative viewing locations. Hans Richter, in a book written in conjunction with the cinema section of the Stuttgart *Film und Foto* exhibition, stressed the importance of film clubs and societies in fostering the creative potential of film against that of the commercial industry (1968, pp. 118–23). Richter was one of the figures who sought to develop politically radical film that drew on avant-garde practices, an approach he developed in more Brechtian directions in his *The Struggle for the Film* written in the late 1930s, although only revised and published much later (Richter 1986). On the significance of film clubs and societies to the history of avant-garde film, see also Hagener 2007, pp. 77–120.

83 Ross 2006, p. 172. One problem with Ross's detailed breakdown of audiences, however, is that he says little about gender differences in viewing patterns; interestingly, though, most of his specific anecdotes involve women.

ment', the integrated structure of capitalist culture most famously embodied in the image of the Tiller Girls. The Tiller Girls were one of a number of dance troupes whose performances were known for their elaborate choreographies exemplified by the kick-line. Kracauer was by no means unique in seeing these troupes as emblematic of modernity,⁸⁴ but in the context of his work they took on powerful new meanings. They embody the mass ornament, a wholly rationalised spectacle integrating the bodies of both performers and audience. Rejecting conservative moralising critiques of their sexual dangers, Kracauer described the Tiller Girls as 'a linear system that no longer has any erotic meaning but at best points to the locus of the erotic'.⁸⁵ While they were a consumer product, a commodity, for Kracauer their significance was that they expressed the interlocking logics of production and consumption, work and leisure. Their images were mass reproduced, disseminated widely in newsreels, magazines, and other mass media, but their rationalised structure also echoed Fordist and Taylorist forms of production. As he argued in his 1931 article 'Girls and Crisis', '[t]hey were not just an American product, they demonstrated at the same time the power of American methods of production'.⁸⁶ The idea of the mass ornament grounded Kracauer's theorisation of a non-reductive or deterministic base-superstructure relationship. 'The mass ornament is the aesthetic reflex of the rationality to which the prevailing economic system aspires'.⁸⁷

Kracauer's critique drew on the sociological distinction between traditional and modern society. He argued that '[t]he bearer of the ornaments is the *mass* and not the people [*Volk*], for whenever the people form figures, the latter do not hover in midair but arise out of a community'.⁸⁸ Despite this seeming juxtaposition of artificiality and authenticity, however, Kracauer refused both a *völkisch* nostalgia and an elitist critique of mass culture. 'Educated people', he argued,

have taken offense at the emergence of the Tiller Girls and the stadium images. They judge anything that entertains the crowd to be a distraction of that crowd. But despite what they think, the *aesthetic* pleasure gained

84 The most notable earlier example is Giese 1925. They also make an appearance in Ruttmann's *Berlin, Symphony of a Great City*, serving as one of many examples of the rationalised forms of urban, industrial life that the film lyrically and uncritically explores. See also Donald 2007, pp. 49–51.

85 'The Mass Ornament', in Kracauer 1995, p. 77.

86 Kracauer 1994, p. 241.

87 'The Mass Ornament', in Kracauer 1995, p. 79.

88 'The Mass Ornament', in Kracauer 1995, p. 76.

from ornamental mass movements is *legitimate* . . . No matter how low one gauges the value of the mass ornament, its degree of reality is still higher than that of artistic productions which cultivate outdated noble sentiments in obsolete forms – even if it means nothing more than that.⁸⁹

Kracauer's rejection of an elitist critique thus set him apart not only from moralising bourgeois critics, but also from the dominant left critiques of mass culture that often replicated these bourgeois concerns. He did not, however, discount the deeply repressive nature of mass culture. Films, he argued in his 1930 critique of the new white-collar worker, 'drug the populace with the pseudo-glamour of counterfeit social heights, just as hypnotists use glittering objects to put their subjects to sleep. The same applies to the illustrated papers and the majority of magazines . . . The flight of images is a flight from revolution and from death.'⁹⁰

In resisting a moralistic bourgeois critique he offers a fundamentally different conception of the audience. The audience is not a distinct object, but part of what we might call an 'audience-spectacle'. Kracauer conceived of the mass ornament as an integrated totality, the 'aesthetic reflex' of a capitalist totality to which there is no 'outside'. As Esther Leslie suggests, the abstract and rationalised geometrical forms of the mass ornament are a marker for Kracauer of the fundamental irrationality of capitalist production that 'itself is an ornament that arranges humans into interrelating patterns, while abstracting from their humanness, removing their autonomy or decision-making powers.'⁹¹ This is evident with the Tiller Girls whose bodies themselves express this dehumanisation and bodily alienation: '[t]he Tiller Girls can no longer be reassembled into human beings after the fact . . . Arms, thighs, and other segments are the smallest component parts of the composition.'⁹² The Tiller Girls thus demonstrate the impossibility of the nostalgic dream of bodily wholeness, but also the subsumption of the fragment under the totalising systemic logic.

Kracauer's approach here echoes more recent feminist critiques of the fragmentation of the female body in commercial culture, but his work lacks a sense of women as anything but passive and primitive spectators. If the Tiller Girls are the feminised embodiment of alienated production, his 'little shop-girls' are the spectatorial equivalent. In 1927 Kracauer published a series of vignettes over eight days in the left-liberal *Frankfurter Zeitung*, the newspaper

89 'The Mass Ornament', in Kracauer 1995, p. 79.

90 Kracauer 1998, p. 94.

91 Leslie 2007, p. 39.

92 'The Mass Ornament', in Kracauer 1995, p. 78.

in which many of his essays first appeared. Collected under the heading 'The Little Shopgirls Go to the Movies', the vignettes each addressed a recurrent theme in Weimar popular film, with Kracauer analysing their implications in practices of domination. The distracted consumer of the mass spectacle is in each case figured as a 'little shopgirl'. Thus, for example, the power of military films: '[i]t is hard for the little shopgirls to resist the appeal of the marches and the uniforms'.⁹³ These primitive viewers are unable to resist the spectacle. 'Sensational film hits and life usually correspond to each other because the Little Miss Typists model themselves after the examples they see on the screen'.⁹⁴ As with Frau Blechnudel, the 'Little Miss Typists' are incapable of anything but a primitive and immediate relationship with the screen.

While Kracauer exempted gendered relations from critical analysis, there were those who foregrounded this dimension of spectatorial relations. We saw this with the work of Hannah Höch in the previous chapter, her photo-montages stressing the gendered ways in which women's bodies and subjectivities were fragmented and constructed through capitalist cultural practices. The painter Elsa Haensgen-Dingkuhn – who we also saw in the last chapter – likewise configured the gendered spectator–spectacle relationship rather differently in her 1929 painting *Dancers in a Hall*. Here we have a cabaret kick-line similar to the Tiller Girls, but where Kracauer tends to keep his audience and spectacle separate (the Little Miss Typists are not the audience for the Tiller Girls), Haensgen-Dingkuhn has both a man and woman watching. Most significant is that the woman is in fact actively looking out of the canvas at the viewer, implicating the viewer in this relationship of looking in a way that destabilises the notion of the passive female audience. Kracauer's deployment of dual feminised objects – women as both spectacle for an implied male gaze and as cultural dupes – is destabilised in Haensgen-Dingkuhn's depiction of the woman as an active, if subordinated, agent in the production of the mass ornament.⁹⁵

Kracauer was certainly correct in stressing the extension of the principle of instrumental rationality to all areas of social life, including the regulation of gendered social relations. Taylorist principles of industrial production were increasingly applied to women's unwaged labour in the home as well as to the realm of leisure.⁹⁶ For the organisers of the massive *Gesolei* social hygiene

93 'The Little Shopgirls Go to the Movies', in Kracauer 1995, p. 298.

94 'The Little Shopgirls Go to the Movies', in Kracauer 1995, p. 292.

95 See Meskimmon 1999, pp. 185–87 for a discussion of the painting.

96 Key accounts include Bridenthal 1984; Nolan 1994, pp. 206–26; Grossmann 1986; Benninghaus 2000.

exhibition put on in Düsseldorf in 1926, for example, an exhibition I will discuss at length later, the rationalised organisation of unwaged housework was premised on the need to integrate this work with the wage labour that many women were simultaneously performing.⁹⁷ This rationalised woman found its cultural expression in the ambivalent figure of the *neue Frau*, the new woman. The *neue Frau* was one of the most powerful symbols of the Weimar period, in particular the period of economic stabilisation and the *neue Sachlichkeit* of the mid-1920s, and it was as film spectator that she was often depicted.

The *neue Frau* was most often identifiable by the *Bubikopf*, a short haircut with sharp lines that exemplified her cool, rationalised character, her 'emancipation' from traditional patriarchal relations, and her participation in public space and the world of wage labour.⁹⁸ It was precisely these characteristics that simultaneously marked her as a threat, however.⁹⁹ Ernst Jünger's description of the *neue Frau* is typical. 'How is it that these tremendous female bodies, in shape, suntanned and delineated with every cosmetic means, are as tasteless for one's appetite as Californian apples?'¹⁰⁰ Jünger's characterisation echoes that of Kracauer, both in stressing the non-erotic nature of the *neue Frau* and in associating her with the United States. These arguments have much more to do with a resistance on the part of male critics to women's new occupation of public space and the scope offered by shifting gender relations for expressions of women's sexuality than with a critical analysis of the rationalisation of femininity.

97 The assumption of the organisers, however, was that women's waged labour, in common with unwaged labour, was primarily in care-giving areas rather than clerical work (see Freese 1927, pp. 520–22). Note as well that this rationalisation of gendered spheres and roles intersects with the gendered politics of labour that I have examined in earlier chapters. If, as I argued, the state, trade unions, left parties, and many employers favoured purging women from workforces, the rationalisation of women's work represented a more accommodating, if also often repressive, approach to changing gendered roles.

98 A rather startling and ahistorical invocation of the haircut comes from Gustav Reuter, one of the organisers of the *Gesolei* exhibition. Linking morality and hygiene, he says that in one image on a Greek vase we see a male Greek youth at the Symposium with a female friend. He describes her rather anachronistically as having 'what is for a hetaera a typical haircut, a Bubikopf' (Reuter 1927, p. 663). Thus, recourse to the Greeks demonstrates not only the transhistorical universality of the hairstyle, but also its association with a prostitute identity.

99 See Grossmann 1986; Ward 2001, pp. 81–91.

100 Quoted in Ward 2001, p. 89. Jünger makes a common link here between modernity and America, the California apples marking a modern nature denuded of substance.

The implications of these contestations over women's occupation of public space can be seen in relation to the bohemian café culture with which the *neue Frau* was so often associated. As Bettina Götz argues, 'the café as a public space became the scene for the conflict between traditional bourgeois understandings of gender roles and the demand for women's self-sufficiency and equal rights. Thus the café proved to be a significant place where the new woman's emancipatory claims to public space became evident'.¹⁰¹ Artists like Otto Dix or Christian Schad turned to the figure of the *neue Frau* in their depictions of this culture, although to rather different effect. Not surprisingly, given my discussion in the previous chapter, Dix found it difficult to accept the new woman, 'neutering' her in his work and re-establishing a masculine hegemony over public space, most notably, suggests Götz, in his portrait of Sylvia Harden. Christian Schad's 1928 *Sonja* is different, Götz argues, offering a more critical and realistic portrayal of women in public space (Ill. 23). 'Schad depicted the perfect beauty ideal of the new woman propagated by the ubiquitous fashion magazines of the 1920s',¹⁰² but his painting also emphasised the ambivalent nature of the *neue Frau*, suggesting both her transgressive presence and the price she must pay for that transgression. Schad presents Sonja, a young secretary he had met, sitting in the *Romanisches Café*. Her cold aloofness is alluring, but her blank face as well as her isolation from people and her surroundings, hemmed in as she is by an empty table, also suggest that the power she projects reflects but a tenuous and precarious hold on public space.

The image of the *neue Frau* was especially prominent in film. Given that she represented a challenge to dominant gendered norms, her filmic image was often haunted by the spectre of the prostitute, the figure through which, as I have discussed in earlier chapters, those gendered contestations were so often read. These filmic narratives were almost always tragic, although in the early case of Richard Oswald's 1919 educational film *Prostitution*, which developed the argument that sex work was driven by economic need, critics argued that it was not tragic enough, and hence did not serve as an adequate deterrent. Even on the left Oswald's film was accused of making sex work seem too enticing, particularly through its depiction of a richly appointed brothel. As one review argued: 'more needed graphically to be shown of the sorrow, the terrible misery, the moral and spiritual degradation of the "girls of pleasure" and their slow but sure bodily ruin. That would certainly become painful and perhaps gruesome, but this should not matter for a true enlightenment film'.¹⁰³ Bertolt Brecht

101 Götz 2001, p. 59.

102 Götz 2001, p. 60.

103 Quoted in Kasten 2005a, p. 128.



ILLUSTRATION 23 *Christian Schad, Sonja, 1928, Oil on canvas, 90 × 60 cm.*

© ESTATE OF MAX BECKMANN/SODRAC (2014). PHOTO CREDIT:
BPK, BERLIN/NATIONALGALERIE, STAATLICHE MUSEEN,
BERLIN/JOERG P. ANDERS/ART RESOURCE, NY.

likewise stressed the degrading character of these films in an early commentary on film from 1919, citing *Prostitution* as an especially popular example of films that commodified a false freedom and which in fact enabled the exploitation of women.¹⁰⁴

More commonly, though, films on prostitution reflected the dominant view associating sex work with disease, crime, and death. The 1927 film *A Prostitute's Tragedy* (*Dirnentragödie*), for example, tells the story of Auguste Groner (Asta Nielsen in her last film role), an older prostitute whose attempts to find love and a new career as owner of a pastry shop are doomed to failure because of her sex working background. The film depicts her struggles sympathetically, a notable difference from many other portrayals, but ultimately offers her no way out. Auguste falls in love with a younger middle-class man rebelling against his family, but she is thwarted by her younger roommate and co-worker Clarissa. Tormented by her desire to escape her life, Auguste convinces her pimp Anton to murder Clarissa, which he does. The film ends with a group of residents, including two sex workers, reading a newspaper story headlined 'A Prostitute's Tragedy', the story itself explaining how Auguste had committed suicide seeking to escape arrest. One of the workers says sadly: '[a]nd so we will all eventually end up'. These connections between money, sex, and death frame the film, literally in scenes that bookend the film. At the beginning we see a worker/client interaction enacted solely by their feet,¹⁰⁵ a scene mirrored at the end of the film, but this time with the camera following the feet of Anton and Clarissa as he murders her.

In these and other similar films prostitutes are given the attributes of the *neue Frau*, but they are inflicted with the social hygienic lesson of the dangers of an improper occupation of public space. Despite this stigmatising tendency, however, female viewers could arguably still identify with the stories and characters in films like *A Prostitute's Tragedy*. As Patrice Petro argues in the case of that film, 'the very pathos surrounding Auguste's futile attempts at class rise would appear to address directly a female audience whose desire for mobility was not only similarly frustrated but also repressed in ordinary psychic and social circumstances'.¹⁰⁶ Thus, despite the social hygienic impulse of the film, there is room here for viewers to take home alternate readings in which they are positioned as agents.

104 Bertolt Brecht, 'On Life in the Theatre', in Silberman 2000, p. 3. These perspectives echo the themes that emerged in Otto Dix's obscenity trial that I discussed in the last chapter.

105 A similar scene is used to introduce the prostitute in *The Other Side of the Street*.

106 Petro 1989, p. 174.

We can see these complexities in the films of one of Weimar's most famous directors, Georg Wilhelm Pabst, whose films like *Pandora's Box* (1928) or *Diary of a Lost Girl* (1929) developed complex narratives around the *neue Frau*, sex work, and women's public place. *Pandora's Box*, set in the period of economic stabilisation prior to the onset of the Depression, stars Louise Brooks as Lulu, her *Bubikopf* hairstyle and modern fashions marking her as a new woman. Lulu is the mistress of a wealthy newspaper baron, a Dr. Schön, who, despite wanting to leave her for a respectable marriage with a woman of his own class, is unable to resist her allure. His proposed marriage falls through, and he decides to marry Lulu despite the scandal that would follow. At the celebration, though, he sees Lulu with her former patron Schigolch, a rather ineffectual old man whose shabby clothes and demeanour suggest that Lulu has risen far beyond her beginnings. Schön is enraged, and tries to force Lulu to shoot herself. Schön and Lulu struggle, and he is shot dead. Lulu is convicted of manslaughter, but escapes. She flees the country with Alwa, Schön's son who, it emerges, is also in love with Lulu. They live on a casino boat where Alwa loses all his money and Lulu is threatened with being sold to an Egyptian 'white slaver'. They manage to escape to London where Lulu, Alwa, and Schigolch wind up in a desolate attic tenement. Lulu goes out onto the street to find money where we see posters warning of a serial killer of women who is on the loose. Lulu meets him, and is murdered.

The story's arc traces the intersections of gender and class in particularly stark terms. Lulu generates a powerful sexual attraction – her relations with men are all highly sexualised, an attraction that also enables her to manipulate the Countess Geschwitz, one of the first lesbian characters in mainstream cinema – which is ultimately the cause of her downfall. Feminine characteristics infect the men in the film as well, leading them to their doom. This is particularly the case with Alwa, whose passivity renders him entirely vulnerable. Even the elder Schön, a more powerful patriarchal figure, pays with his life for his inability to bring himself to kill Lulu directly. In Lulu's case, her rise and descent is linked directly to class, which is especially evident in the contrast between the opulent apartment where the film begins and the squalid tenement where it ends.

The lower-class district of London is also where the sex murderer lurks, a potent symbol, as we saw in the previous chapter, of the sexual and gendered politics of the period. The film is interesting, though, in the ambivalent way it treats this murder. Thomas Elsaesser suggests that, unlike with the 'ecstatic and apocalyptic' sexual murders depicted by artists like Dix, the film remains allusive in not depicting the killing. The film 'cites' these tropes and rehearses the punishments meted out to unruly women more than it participates in

them.¹⁰⁷ 'The achievement, in other words, is to have presented sexuality *in* the cinema as the sexuality *of* the cinema, and to have used as his [Pabst's] starting point the crisis in the self-understanding of male and female sexuality that characterised his own period, the Weimar, of wounded male egos confronting the "New Woman"'.¹⁰⁸ Elsaesser's focus on the crisis of subjectivity tied to sexuality perceptively highlights themes that I have dealt with extensively, but what he is ultimately interested in is the crisis of the wounded *male* ego. This misses both the fact that viewers of these films were more likely to be women, and that the film is as much about the 'new woman' herself. Lulu is not simply the passive object on which violence is enacted and against which the male subject confronts himself, but an agent who expresses the contradictions and constraints faced by Weimar women. The film moves beyond a simple tale of morality or social hygiene by addressing the social dimensions of the constraints that *produce* the 'fallen' woman.

For Patrice Petro, Elsaesser's reading misses this dimension of Pabst's films because he assumes a male spectator and thus reads the film solely in terms of a crisis of masculinity. A more sophisticated reading can be substantiated if we start from the perspective of the actual audience of Weimar film in which women played a prominent part.¹⁰⁹ The implications of considering the female spectator are especially evident in Pabst's *Diary of a Lost Girl* (1929), which is structured much more explicitly around the central female character, and which directly addresses practices of social hygiene. The film's protagonist, Thymian, is the daughter of a well-off pharmacist whose life is transformed when she is taken advantage of and impregnated by Meinert, the shop manager. After being forced to give up her baby,¹¹⁰ she spends time in a home for fallen girls, escapes, and works in a high-class brothel. The scenes in the brothel are notable in that, while Pabst offers half-hearted indications of the dangers of sex work, the brothel appears as a place of relative freedom,

107 Elsaesser 2000, p. 273.

108 Elsaesser 2000, p. 286.

109 Petro 1989, pp. 14–17.

110 Elsaesser argues that Thymian's pregnancy and loss of her baby produces a film very different from *Pandora's Box*, 'making her the classic female victim, and the film more like the classic social melodrama. It is as if with the introduction of the biological function of women, one cannot escape sociology and bourgeois morality, whereas in *Pandora's Box* it is precisely the absence of these motifs that makes the cinematic erotic shine out so brilliantly but also so coldly' (2000, p. 287). Again here Elsaesser's account is structured around an implied male spectator for whom the erotic is sharply distinguished from the maternal. What is interesting about *Diary*, however, is that the subsequent trajectory of the film is *not* in fact structured by the inaugural maternal loss.

especially in contrast to the repressive bourgeois home and the home for fallen girls.

The film's depiction of this institutional home is particularly interesting. There Thymian and the other girls are kept under the watchful and threatening eye of a giant guard, a silent and powerful man who constantly surveilles and controls the girls, a phallic figure of arbitrary, often sexualised, and potentially violent male authority. Above him is the headmistress, whose dour and repressive practices contrast with the rather more cheery and indulgent control exercised by the madam of the brothel. This headmistress is one of the bourgeois reformers who, as we have seen in earlier discussions of the women's movement, were so active in practices of social hygienic and moral regulation. The film's contrast between the home and the brothel thus implies a critique of the abolitionist and social hygienic approach to sex work. Indeed, unlike in so many films depicting prostitution, Thymian does not meet with death, but, through a series of events, marries an older man who enables her return to her bourgeois station. Her husband even installs her on the board of directors of the home in which she was held, leading her to denounce the authoritarianism implicit in ideas of 'rescue'. Her husband gets the last word, concluding the film with a rather saccharine warning to the board: '[a] little more love and no one would be lost in this world!' The film, however, belongs to Thymian, her 'redemption' grounded more on a repudiation of bourgeois practices of morality and hygiene than on their reassertion.

In this sense *Diary* is quite explicit in keeping open the ambivalence that Patrice Petro argues was at the heart of Weimar melodramatic film. Petro stresses that these films were especially popular with women and need to be read with this implied audience in mind: 'the inscription of multiple spaces for spectator identification is a convention of the melodramatic mode'.¹¹¹ Especially for women viewers, she suggests, these multiple identifications opened up the possibility for readings that went against the grain of the overarching narratives of the films. Even in *Pandora's Box*, the pleasurable possibilities of the different settings in which Lulu found herself can be read independently of the teleological narrative. At the same time, these films (especially *Diary*) can be read as responses to the limited possibilities open to women in the period, constraints that were felt even more strongly as the impact of the Depression began to be felt. It is in this sense that Petro highlights a scene that recurs frequently in many of the Weimar melodramas: 'a female figure stands outside a locked or closed door and begins knocking, then pounding, as if to express the force of an ineffable desire and anger. That this singular gesture of frustration

111 Petro 1989, pp. 152–53.

and defiance reappeared, almost unchanged, in various film melodramas of the 1920s, indicates that the contours of female subjectivity and desire were markedly different from those typically associated with the male subject in Weimar'.¹¹²

One figure in *Diary of a Lost Girl* makes this ambivalence explicit, offering direct commentary on male investment in these structures of repression. When Thymian is first introduced to the brothel, she decides to make money giving dance lessons. Her first lesson is broken up when a large man enters and chastises her client. Thymian asks who he is. 'That's Dr. Vitalis', answers another worker, 'he always wants to save us – but in the end he joins us'. Vitalis thus represents the medicalised intervention that dominated state and extra-state responses to sex work. He is a rather comical and ineffective figure, however, deflating the pretensions to mastery that underlay the rescue project. More importantly, in joining them in drink and, implicitly, sexual activity, he demonstrates the complicity of regulatory and medical regimes in the sexual economy of the brothel. He is a doctor-saviour, but also a client. As saviour, he organises a raffle to rescue Thymian, but this fails, with her father, who had come to the club, witnessing the scene. Dr. Vitalis is crushed by his failure, proclaiming: '[y]es, Thymian, now you are a lost girl – just as we are all lost!' The dream of rescue, the film thus implies, is inextricably linked to both bourgeois and patriarchal authority structures and the political economy of sex work. Crucially, though, rescue is an abject failure.

Pabst's films thus demonstrate the extent to which we need to consider Weimar audiences themselves rather than the dominant depictions of those audiences if we are to understand the complexity of the gender and class dynamics at work in film, as well as the nature of the 'primitive' audience being posited by so many critics. Rather than directly mimicking that which appears onscreen, women could engage in complex ways with the cinematic experience. This complexity was taken up directly in Irmgard Keun's 1932 novel *The Artificial Silk Girl*. More than Pabst, Keun was writing explicitly of a crisis in feminine subjectivity, and speaking directly to a female readership. Doris, the hero of the novel, is the sort of new woman Kracauer has in mind. She is the 'type' that he describes in his book on white-collar workers, 'girls who come to the big city in search of adventure and roam like comets through the world of the salaried employees. Their career is unpredictable and even the best astronomer cannot determine whether they will end up on the street or in the marriage bed'.¹¹³

112 Petro 1989, p. 218.

113 Kracauer 1998, p. 73.

While Doris's precarious existence matches that of Kracauer's type, Keun paints her with a far more nuanced brush. This can be seen particularly in the way Keun depicts her engagement with film, with the novel presenting her dreams of social mobility as mediated by the cinematic imagination. Like Frau Blechnudel, she is immersed in the images produced by the film industry, moving to Berlin to fulfil her dreams of becoming a movie star and to live out the lifestyles depicted in film. In her imagination, Doris literally becomes film: 'I was a movie and a weekly newsreel all by myself'.¹¹⁴ However, this dreamworld comes up against the often-brutal realities of Depression-era Weimar. Her narrativisation of her life as a movie is fleeting and self-conscious. She is the author of her own script, but she is also quite conscious of the extent to which her writing is constrained and shaped by the limited possibilities open to her. That is, unlike Kracauer, who tends to configure the little shopgirls as blank slates upon which the cinematic text can be written, Keun presents a complex character whose experiences are profoundly mediated by, but never reducible to, the medium or texts of film.

Keun's novel was written for a wide audience, but we can see these critical perspectives articulated more clearly in the cultural production emerging from the subcultural milieu for which Weimar Germany, and especially Berlin, remains famous. Indications of these subcultures, ranging from the criminal underground to gay and lesbian communities, were found frequently in films. The depiction of nightlife and brothels was common, but we also have other significant examples like the character of Countess Geschwitz in *Pandora's Box*, who was one of the first lesbian characters in film. Geschwitz is not really a fully-formed character, however, and films in general tended to reproduce the voyeuristic fascination with queer sexuality that was common in the period, evident for example in the sex researcher Curt Moreck's 1931 *Guide Through the 'Depraved' Berlin*.¹¹⁵ At the same time, though, the extent to which those subcultures themselves influenced film and other forms of mass culture should not be underestimated. Moreck's guidebook even used the paintings of Jeanne Mammen, whose work was rooted in the significant lesbian subcultures of Berlin.¹¹⁶ Like Hannah Höch, Mammen was an insider to the fashion industry, working as an illustrator for a number of high-circulation women's magazines. As Marsha Meskimmon argues:

114 Keun 2002, p. 111. Her sense of her life as a movie is there from the beginning of the novel (see p. 3).

115 Moreck 1996.

116 Lütgens 1997.

Mammen's location of a critique within the cycle of pleasurable consumption suggests an embodied maker and viewer of art and media imagery and reveals the distanced position of the elite masculine critic to be untenable. There was no place outside this spectacular commodity culture from which to argue against it; negotiations of power and pleasure took place from inside. As a woman artist, and one working in both fashion illustration and in Berlin's lesbian underground, Mammen was ideally situated to explore the multifaceted nature of the *neue Frau* stereotype, and her work refutes the argument that women consumed mass media imagery uncritically.¹¹⁷

Mammen's challenge to the conception of the passive spectator implied in Kracauer's work was nourished by her experience in the dissident sexual cultures of Berlin. These cultures were sustained by extensive media networks – in particular print media – that targeted gay and lesbian audiences. The mass-circulation magazines *Die Freundin* and *Die Insel* catered to lesbians and gay men respectively, the latter reaching a circulation of 150,000 in 1930.¹¹⁸ Novels like Anna Weirauch's *The Scorpion*, published in three parts between 1919 and 1931, were written for a lesbian audience. *The Scorpion* engaged not only with the pleasures and difficulties of lesbian desire, but also with the sexological and sociological production of the lesbian body. Myra, the central character in the book, reads up on this literature as she tries to make sense of her life, the novel offering an implicit critique of dominant approaches to same-sex desire.¹¹⁹ These critical perspectives were a frequent theme in publications, linking these popular cultures with movements seeking to decriminalise homosexuality. Margarete Roellig's 1928 *The Lesbians of Berlin*, for example, was introduced by the sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld and offered a sociological analysis of the cafés, salons, and other events around which lesbian life coalesced, with the purpose of combating homophobic misconceptions.¹²⁰

117 Meskimmon 1999, pp. 181–83. When placed in Moreck's work, which looked in on such subcultures from the outside, Mammen's work arguably lost some of its critical implications though.

118 Vogel 1992, p. 162. See also Espinaco-Virseda 2004; Schäfer 1992; Schoppmann 1992.

119 Weirauch 1975, pp. 114–17. On the book, see Schoppmann 1985.

120 Roellig 1992. Weininger's conception of sexuality, which I discussed in the second chapter, provided the horizon for Roellig and many other sexologists and activists (see pp. 22–24 for Roellig's comments). Weininger's conception of sexuality as a continuum was frequently redeployed, albeit for very different political purposes. An article in *Die Freundin*, for example, argued that '[t]here is no absolute man. There is no absolute woman. There are only bisexual variations... Ultimately, on closer examination we are all after all homosexual – some more, some less' (quoted in Vogel 1992, p. 164).

In film, these subcultural contexts appeared primarily to shock viewers, as markers of degeneration, but there were exceptions. Perhaps the most famous was Leontine Sagan's 1931 film *Girls in Uniform*. The film provides an interesting counterpoint to *Diary of a Lost Girl*. Like that film, *Girls in Uniform* is set in an authoritarian girl's reform school, but develops an even more explicit critique of these authoritarian structures, again embodied in the figure of a strict headmistress. The school is steeped in nationalist and militarist practices, enacting in microcosm the repressive gendered relations of the state. Sexuality is a key locus of this repression. The main character, Manuela, falls in love with one of her teachers, a fraught relationship that is presented sympathetically in the film, but one that is doomed by the surveillance and repression exerted in the institution. The film thus aligns compulsory heterosexuality directly with nationalism and militarism, with lesbian desire marking a rupture in that closed logic and opening up the possibility for imagining other social relations. The film ends tragically as Manuela tries to kill herself, but, unlike in *Pandora's Box*, which is ambivalent in this respect, this tragedy is not configured as a punishment for sexual transgression. Rather, it serves as an indictment of the structures of repression. *Girls in Uniform* achieved a significant success with mainstream audiences, both in Germany and abroad.

Both in mainstream commercial cinema and in alternative networks of cultural production, then, women in the Weimar period had a range of media texts on which to draw. While these products addressed women primarily as consumers (both of the media themselves, and in terms of their social roles), these forms of mass and popular culture offered a range of resources through which their place in the social order could be negotiated. Indeed, filmmakers were arguably far more attuned to the differentiated needs of women than were many critics and film theorists, even while they saw this diversity primarily in market terms. As Janet McCabe argues, gendered film spectatorship in the Weimar period thus needs to be understood as a process of unequal negotiation between female viewers and the film industry. As a liminal space between public and private, the theatre offered a safe respite from daily tasks and a shared social space for the production and negotiation of femininity itself. It was thus at once a part of the rationalised entertainment and leisure industries and a site of potential reworking of the meanings generated by film. As McCabe argues, the fact that consumerism itself was often parodied in the films suggests that the filmmakers were aware of the instability at the heart of spectatorial investments.¹²¹ 'Regulating its own industrial practices and carefully structuring the formal strategies of the film text, popular cinema

121 McCabe 2003, pp. 31–33.

sought to appeal directly to its imagined constituency through encouraging considerable audience participation (consumers, audience members, fans, urban travelers) while inscribing those new institutional identities into the very form of its products'.¹²²

It is at this point that a return to Kracauer is especially fruitful. For all the problems with his conception of the gendered spectator, his theorisation of the mass ornament offers a powerful way of thinking through the position of the audience in this fractured totality. For Kracauer, the emergence of this audience-spectacle was a part of broader social shifts exemplified by the rise to prominence of a new social stratum or class fraction, namely clerical or white-collar employees. *The Salaried Masses*, a series of essays published initially in the feuilleton section of the *Frankfurter Zeitung* in 1929 and released the following year in book form, traced these shifts. The essays, published as the Depression was beginning to bite, argued that the 1920s had witnessed a shift in the composition of the workforce: the number of white-collar employees had increased dramatically at the same time as these positions were being rationalised and proletarianised. The 'little shopgirls' of his film theory were part of this larger class fraction that was materially close to the working class, but which clung desperately to bourgeois consciousness. Kracauer first diagnosed this condition as a form of exile or homelessness suffered by the intellectual in his 1922 article 'Those Who Wait'. The progressive disenchantment of the world, he argued, produced a rupture between the spiritual and the intellectual, a loss of a sense of spiritual totality.¹²³ By the late 1920s he found a similar condition of homelessness amongst the salaried masses. Where the working class could find shelter under the umbrella of Marxist ideas (although these ideas, he says, were springing leaks), the

mass of salaried employees differ from the worker proletariat in that they are spiritually homeless. For the time being they cannot find their way to their comrades, and the house of bourgeois ideas and feelings in which they used to live has collapsed, its foundations eroded by economic development. They are living at present without a doctrine to look up at or a goal they might ascertain. So they live in fear of looking up and asking their way to the destination.¹²⁴

¹²² McCabe 2003, p. 36.

¹²³ 'Those Who Wait', in Kracauer 1995, pp. 129–40.

¹²⁴ Kracauer 1998, p. 88.

The Salaried Masses is thus a sort of ethnographic study of this new class fraction, a study of what he calls an 'unknown territory'.¹²⁵ Kracauer makes the parallel with ethnography quite explicit, tying it in complex ways to film. 'Hundreds of thousands of salaried employees throng the streets of Berlin daily', he argues in setting the stage for his study, 'yet their life is more unknown than that of the primitive tribes at whose habits those same employees marvel in films'.¹²⁶ Kracauer's argument thus captures the complex meanings of the primitive with which I began this section. The primitive denotes at once the audience, the spectacle itself, and the objectified bodies presented in those films. Crucially (and here is where Kracauer's analysis diverges most strongly from dominant critiques of the primitive audience), the salaried masses are unable to think out of this contradiction not because of their inherent primitive nature, but because of their class position. They

nurture a false consciousness . . . A vanished bourgeois way of life haunts them. Perhaps it contains forces with a legitimate demand to endure. But they survive today only inertly, without getting involved in a dialectic with the prevailing conditions, and so themselves undermine the legitimacy of their continued existence.¹²⁷

As with Ernst Bloch, who argued that these non-contemporaneous social strata provided fertile ground for the radical right, Kracauer contended in a series of articles in 1931 that the salaried masses formed the bedrock of a conservative anti-capitalism exemplified by the influential journal *Die Tat*.¹²⁸

Kracauer's book provides an important early theorisation of the increasing rationalisation and proletarianisation of non-industrial labour, and even more so an acute awareness of the extent to which these processes of rationalisation had permeated the totality of social life. Anticipating aspects of both Horkheimer and Adorno's argument in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and Henri Lefebvre's work on everyday life, Kracauer argued that for the salaried

125 This is the title given to the opening section of the book (Kracauer 1998).

126 Kracauer 1998, p. 29. The original German subtitle of the book, 'From Newest Germany' (*Aus dem neuesten Deutschland*), foregrounded this sense of uncovering a strange land.

127 Kracauer 1998, pp. 81–82.

128 'Revolt of the Middle Classes: An Examination of the *Tat* Circle', in Kracauer 1995, pp. 122–23. For Bloch's notion of 'non-contemporaneity', see Bloch 1990, pp. 104–16. While Kracauer does not discuss the rise of Hitler here, his work does provide an incipient theory of the fascist personality that he developed later, and arguably with less subtlety, in *From Caligari to Hitler*.

masses work and leisure were integrated, the monotony of work obscured by the world of mass culture, '[a] world every last corner of which is cleansed, as though with a vacuum cleaner, of the dust of everyday existence'.¹²⁹ However, this world is itself rationalised, with everything from sport to film integrated into the rationalised social totality. For Fritz Karpfen, this was the root of kitsch; unlike art, which required a critical distance and autonomy, kitsch is ready-made for consumption by the subjugated masses who spend most of their time trying to earn enough to live.¹³⁰ As Kracauer put it, 'salaried employees today live in masses, whose existence – especially in Berlin and the other big cities – increasingly assumes a standard character'. This standardisation is evident especially in 'the emergence of certain standard types of salesgirl, draper's assistant, shorthand typist and so on, which are portrayed and at the same time cultivated in magazines and cinemas'.¹³¹ For all of his insight into class relations, notable here is that again the cultural dupes are configured as women.

Mascha Kaléko, writing in the *Vossische Zeitung* in the early 1930s, offered a much more nuanced critique of the gendered nature of these contradictions. For her, the women of whom Kracauer writes so glibly were in fact caught in an intolerable contradiction, with the work–leisure dichotomy that structured daily life felt especially acutely by women. This can be seen in her 1933 story 'Girl at the Typewriter', which captures the devastating monotony of the new forms of feminised white-collar labour. The woman at work '[m]akes a face that in no way matches the cheerful red of the new blouse bought at the last clearance sale'.¹³² The pleasures of shopping (the blouse) are entirely divorced from her work life, and yet these are structurally connected; the low-paid work means that only sale items are accessible, while the brutality of the workday makes the workers unable to remember Sunday leisure.

In reading Kracauer, then, we need to integrate this critical gendered perspective into his class analysis. Kracauer also introduces a further complexity into his reading, though, by stressing the growing alienation and precarity

129 Kracauer 1998, p. 93. This is a particularly interesting metaphor as it (inadvertently) invokes the rationalised world of domestic labour that, as I suggested earlier, marks out a third sphere of rationalisation complementing those of waged labour and leisure.

130 Karpfen 1925, pp. 63–69. Karpfen, however, grounds his notion of kitsch in a social hygienic perspective, arguing that kitsch is 'epidemic', and that it 'is becoming a terrible epidemic and needs to be fought with preemption and inoculation with all the means of spiritual hygiene' (p. 68).

131 Kracauer 1998, p. 68.

132 Kaléko 1975, p. 129.

of intellectuals themselves. Kracauer, and even more so his friend Benjamin, was one of a growing number of intellectuals, predominantly male, relying on sporadic writing assignments and patronage to sustain themselves. It is no accident, then, that Kracauer described intellectuals and the salaried masses in similar terms, and highlighted as well their joint susceptibility to right-wing ideas. By virtue of their ties to a vanishing bourgeois way of life, both groups spanned zones of instability in Weimar society. Thus, Kracauer's work can be read as self-critique as well as sociological analysis of new class strata.

This aspect of his argument gains a powerful resonance when read back into the debates within the KPD in the early Weimar years. In his critique of the KPD's leadership in the March Action in 1921, Paul Levi argued that one of the problems with the putschist tendencies of the ultra-left was that these activists tended to see all class fractions and strata outside a narrowly defined proletariat as part of the bourgeois opposition. For a revolutionary movement to gain broader traction, Levi argued that it was essential for communists to engage with non-proletarian strata; in Russia, this meant especially the peasantry, but in the German situation it was the clerical workers, civil servants, and impoverished intellectuals who were the most significant. 'All these', he argued in his 1921 pamphlet *Our Path*, 'experience the revolution in their own lives'.¹³³ Dismissing these strata as hopelessly reactionary marked a major strategic error on the part of the KPD. 'If the Communist Party is not to come to grief at the very beginning [of the revolutionary process], it will thus have to bring into its purview those questions that concern these middle strata'.¹³⁴

By the time Kracauer was writing in the late 1920s and early 1930s, the left had lost its opportunity for mobilising this 'homeless' class fraction of white-collar workers, which by then was turning more firmly towards the right. In his later *From Caligari to Hitler*, Kracauer argued that film played a central role in this process, but there he puts far too direct an emphasis on film as an ideological vehicle. Rather than simply the purveyor of authoritarian messages, film needs to be understood as part of a broader shift in the nature of production and consumption, work and leisure. The configuration of the audience as primitive crystallised a number of anxieties and tensions that ran through the period, but also produced the audience as an object of intervention. If the films themselves can give us an insight into the nature of these anxieties, it is in the social hygienic disciplining and regulating of the emerging mass audience that, as I will argue in the next section, these anxieties were increasingly managed.

¹³³ Levi 2009, p. 115.

¹³⁴ Levi 2009, p. 118.

5.4 Optical Hygiene: Sanitising Vision

László Moholy-Nagy's utopian conception of 'the hygiene of the optical' involved a technologically-driven dream of perceptual transformation that simultaneously involved a kind of abolition of the audience. The integration of the spectator into a new social totality was a dream that, as we saw with some Expressionist theatre and in the post-War avant-garde, ran through much of the radical culture of the Weimar period, and was taken up as well, as we shall see in the next chapter, in socialist and communist artistic experiments. Given my argument in the last section, though, what was really at issue here was a set of competing critical responses to the emergence of a spectator-spectacle totality that, as Kracauer and others argued, was in the process of emerging through an integrated capitalist culture. This commercial culture, as I have argued, was in fact far more attuned to the differentiated nature of the audience than Moholy-Nagy, who tended to rely on an abstract notion of the spectator. Indeed, Moholy-Nagy's perspective arguably offered only a weak response to the nuanced conception of the audience held by the film industry, not to mention that of the bourgeois film reformers who themselves sought to regulate the consumption of the new media and who targeted workers, women, youth, and other groups claimed to be 'at risk'.

Moholy-Nagy's 'hygiene of the optical', which implied a certain naïve socialism in which class differences could be transcended, was thus profoundly different from the social hygiene that was promoted by these reformers. Equally concerned with working-class health, but to very different ends, they sought to overcome class conflict through the inculcation of bourgeois values and the inoculation of the social body against the dangers of film and other new media. The promiscuous circulation of film and other commodified mass media was seen as a threat to social stability, boundaries, and hierarchies, and ultimately to national health and racial fitness. As with other areas of mass culture that we have looked at, film, photography, and the commercial press were scrutinised through the lens of degeneration. Yet many of these reformers also acknowledged that film as a medium offered therapeutic possibilities that could help to regenerate at-risk populations. The careful interventions that resulted, I will argue, represented a powerful form of class-based disciplining against which the abstract utopianism of the avant-garde had little impact. In this section, then, I will trace out some of the ways in which film, along with other mass cultural forms, became the site of concern and intervention, as well as the perceived source of practices that could enable the regeneration of the *Volkskörper*.

As we saw with the emergence of ideas of the primitive audience, film had already been conceived of as a potential danger or threat to the health of the national body before the War. The emergence of the bourgeois 'film reform movement' responded to this perceived danger, in particular as it related to youth. Fiction films were seen as dangerous, especially the more sensational tales of crime and lust. But it was film itself, reformers argued, that was the true danger to youth. They were out of the house and up late, while the theatres risked becoming, as Hermann Lemke put it in 1907, 'a kind of flesh market'.¹³⁵ The pre-War film reform movement that grew in response was rather loosely and often locally organised, coalescing around a few production companies or publications like *Bild und Film* (*Image and Film*). As we saw in the second chapter, the War gave the movement a strong push, with the demands of the domestic film industry (now freed from external competition) and the propagandistic needs of the state and military giving film a new prominence. The formation of Ufa in 1917, under the aegis of the military, was driven in important ways by the film reform movement. In 1918, the *Kulturabteilung* (culture department) of Ufa was formed to fulfil the state's directive to produce not only military propaganda, but also broader cultural education – a direction that took centre stage in the aftermath of the War.¹³⁶ Ideas of film reform thus moved in two directions, combining a desire to restrict, censor, or control film production and distribution with a push to develop alternative forms of socially useful or hygienic film.

The nature of the anxieties over film is familiar from earlier discussions of degeneration, but in the case of the visual mass cultures responsible for the emergence of new mass audiences these anxieties took on a particularly urgent tone. The film journals *Kinomatographische Monatshefte* and *Der Lehrfilm* (a publication incorporated in the former as a supplement) were deeply involved in debates over film and national health. *Kinomatographische Monatshefte* concluded the lead article to its inaugural issue in April 1921 with the warning that '[t]he state that doesn't do everything in its power to preserve the viability of this valuable organ [film], ruins the health of its own national body [*Volkskörper*]'.¹³⁷ The article, entitled 'The Age of Film', was also concerned with the political economy of film and the precarious state of the German industry in its global context, suggesting the extent to which ideas of 'health' were bound up with economic concerns. While the *Kinodebatte* raged

135 Quoted in Jung 2005, p. 333.

136 Jung and Mühl-Benninghaus 2005, pp. 480–86; Kreimeier 2005, pp. 70–75; Schweisheimer 1920, pp. 38–39.

137 *Kinematographische Monatshefte* 1921, p. 4.

amongst cultural critics over the question of film's status as art and its relationship to theatre, it was these projects of moral regulation and the promotion of national health that arguably had a much greater impact in shaping the trajectory of film production and the film industry over the course of the Weimar period.

The launch of the *Kinematographische Monatshefte* in early 1921 came in the wake of the reestablishment of film censorship in Germany. Film had been subject to state controls before and during the War, but the formation of the new Republic had seen the abolition of censorship. Filmmakers took advantage of the new freedom to unleash what was perceived by many as a flood of 'trash and dirt' (*Schund und Schmutz*) that threatened the health of the nation. Most prominent in this respect were the 'enlightenment films' (*Aufklärungsfilme*) that, as I will discuss shortly, addressed issues of sexuality, prostitution, and other taboo topics with a frankness and – to their critics – lasciviousness that threatened national morality. These films varied significantly, ranging from the more sober and didactic to the sensational, although many critics saw them all as equally culpable. Of these sensational films the prominent film reformer Waldemar Schweisheimer wrote that '[b]ehind the makeshift mask [of "enlightenment"]', there always appears the lustful grimace of the moneygrubbing Faunus'.¹³⁸ Youth, women, and the working class – those at the heart of ideas of the 'primitive' audience – were seen as the most prominent groups at risk.

In a certain sense the perceptions of critics were false. That is, the enlightenment films themselves were often rather conservative, their sensationalist narratives reasserting normative bourgeois notions of the nation, gender, or the heterosexual family. Advertising for the films tended to be much more lurid than the films' content, reinforcing the perception of them as dangerous. Both the films and their advertising reflected a commercial logic that, especially in a time of economic upheaval and inflationary pressures, drove film companies to produce low-budget genre films that could generate a return on investments in as short a time as possible.¹³⁹ While they were perhaps not as lurid as critics feared, these films did make visible themes that had never before been presented in a form so accessible to a mass viewership. To put it simply, the *Aufklärungsfilme* were perceived as dangerous precisely because of their direct commercial appeal to those groups seen as most susceptible to the threat of degeneration. Part of the anxiety generated by these films, then, was that they

138 Schweisheimer 1920, p. 73. For his discussion of 'enlightenment films', see pp. 41–78. Faunus was the Roman god of the fields and forest often equated with the Greek Pan.

139 Hagener and Hans 2000, pp. 7–12.

threatened to destabilise the boundaries of the expert knowledges and bureaucratic rationalities that sought to produce the working class, youth, women, and other marginalised social groups as objects of social hygienic intervention.

Schweisheimer's influential 1920 study *The Meaning of Film for Social Hygiene and Medicine* argued that the impact of film was especially important to consider given the negative impact war had had on national health. The 'surplus' of women resulting from the death of so many men led to serious problems: first, 'higher mortality rates for women because of their entry into unsuitable occupations, in second place an expected increase in sexually transmitted diseases given the inevitable growth in extramarital sexual relations, and further a rise in rates of tuberculosis infection and mortality'.¹⁴⁰ Here we see many of the themes that I traced in the second chapter, a concern over changes in the gendered order linked to sexual impropriety and disease. However, Schweisheimer was among the reformers who, as we shall see, believed that film had the potential both to exacerbate these gendered imbalances, and to provide the means by which it could be remedied.

Faced with a threatening flood of sordid film titles, in May 1920, only eighteen months after the proclamation of the end of censorship in Article 118 of the new constitution, the Motion Picture Law (*Lichtspielgesetz*) was introduced, bringing film back under state control.¹⁴¹ This was, as we shall see, the first step in the reassertion of censorship powers that included the 1926 Law for the Protection of Youth from Trashy and Filthy Literature, a law that was made even more restrictive in 1929 when local authorities were granted additional censorship powers. Yet, whilst censorship was applied to other media, film was unique in that, while literature and other cultural productions were censored only after the fact, movies required the approval of censors *before* release.

In the Reichstag debates of 1919–20 virtually all the political parties agreed on the dangers of uncontrolled film production. Only the USPD, with the memory of the militaristic, patriotic, and state-controlled wartime film production still fresh, argued strongly against censorship and ultimately voted against the law. Despite their fear of the potential political abuses of censorship, many members nevertheless shared the broader view that, as a party deputy put it, the wave of 'prostitution films' was a 'cultural disgrace of the highest order'.¹⁴² Notably, the USPD argued for a socialisation of film production, which made

140 Schweisheimer 1920, n.p. (introduction).

141 Sturm 2000; Kopf 2003. The name of the law was deliberately vague, and the term 'censorship' did not appear, 'examination' (*Prüfung*) being used instead.

142 Quoted in Sturm 2000, p. 64.

any potential strategic alliance with the film industry, which was itself wary of censorship, impossible. For their part, the SPD's qualms over the law were limited to their opposition to a strong police role in the censorship process. Concerns over police intervention were framed in commercial and political terms, with some commentators stressing the importance of supporting the industry as well as regulating social or moral issues. Thus, rather than simply state officials or police, Rudolf Kurtz argued, those governing the industry 'must be men who have a sense of the meaning of film and the film industry'.¹⁴³

The left had strong grounds for worry about the impact of censorship on their activities, although at the time they paid relatively little attention to the issue. There were of course many other crucial questions occupying their time, but the short shrift given to cultural policy was symptomatic of the tendency on both the reformist and revolutionary left to see these matters as peripheral; only later in the Weimar period, as we shall see in the next chapter, did cultural issues move to the fore. Willi Münzenberg, one of the key communist cultural activists, was an exception in this respect, arguing throughout the early 1920s for the need for the KPD to intervene in the cultural realm. As he put it in 1925, 'censorship serves in the first instance for the political control of all films', but especially those of the left.¹⁴⁴

It was the film reform movement and the main right-wing parties, the DVP and DNVP, that drove the debate over censorship. From their arguments, it was clear that Münzenberg's fears of political censorship were well founded. The DNVP, for example, pushed for the inclusion of 'stirring class hatred' as grounds for censoring a film, a provision that was certainly not intended to apply to conservative films.¹⁴⁵ While they were unsuccessful in bringing this into the law, in practice left films were nevertheless frequently censored. Along with immorality and brutality, other grounds for censorship included damaging Germany's reputation, undermining the state, anti-religious sentiment, or endangering public order; all of these provisions could serve as cover for the censoring of left tendencies in film.

The complexities of these debates can be seen in the ways in which the law was implemented. The 1919 film *Different from the Others* (*Anders als die Andern*) provides a prominent example not only of the profoundly conservative nature of the values upheld by the law, but also of the ways in which censorship differentiated the population. The film was produced by the prolific Richard Oswald

143 Kurtz 1921, p. 3.

144 'Erobert den Film', in Münzenberg 1972, p. 60.

145 Sturm 2000, p. 72.

with the close collaboration of the sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld, who himself appeared in the film. Oswald produced a wide variety of films, but is most famous for his controversial *Aufklärungsfilme*, with *Different from the Others* most prominent among them. He was also responsible for the wartime anti-STI film *Let There Be Light!* mentioned in the second chapter (often cited as the first *Aufklärungsfilm*), as well as its sequels dealing with prostitution and abortion. While Oswald was arguably interested in box-office success above anything,¹⁴⁶ the films he produced during and immediately after the War also ‘challenged the German state’s right to legislate sexual behavior’.¹⁴⁷

This was nowhere more evident than in *Different from the Others*, which attacked Paragraph 175 of the Penal Code outlawing male homosexual acts. Starring the prominent actors Conrad Veidt, Reinhold Schünzel, and Anita Berber, the film was built around Hirschfeld’s theories of homosexuality as an intermediate ‘third sex’. While it depicted the thriving urban gay nightlife of the period, the focus was on the tragic consequences of the criminalisation of same-sex practices, in particular social stigmatisation, blackmail, and suicide, all of which were central to the homosexual rights campaigns of the period.¹⁴⁸ This context was set up at the beginning of the film where we see the concert pianist Paul Körner leafing through newspaper stories of mysterious suicides, a foreshadowing of his own fate. His relationship with his young pupil Kurt Sivvers leaves him open to blackmail, which leads to a court case in which both he and his blackmailer are brought forward on charges, Körner under §175. Despite the intervention of the sexologist played by Hirschfeld, the judge reluctantly sentences Körner to a brief prison term. However, it is the social stigma that arises from these revelations that drives Körner to suicide; he is shunned on the streets, and has his concert tour cancelled and his contract revoked.

146 Oswald proved adept at responding to the demand for both entertainment and educational films during the War, but also at developing his own companies and controlling his productions. On his business acumen in these respects, see Kasten 2005b. The potential conflict between the commercial and educational value of his films has remained a consistent theme in discussions of Oswald. Already in 1920, for example, Schweisheimer argued that while some of his films may have had value, ‘one however asks oneself with astonishment and amazement even then, what they actually have to do with the goal announced by their name, namely with enlightenment’ (p. 67).

147 Smith 2010, p. 15.

148 In the novel *The Scorpion* mentioned earlier, for example, extortion and blackmail also play a significant role, with the character Eccarius denouncing the criminalisation of homosexuality for enabling these practices (see Weirauch 1975, p. 204).

Different from the Others was promoted as a social hygiene film, and had strong didactic elements; despite its deviation from commercial forms, however, it proved quite popular with viewers. Hirschfeld's character brings the pedagogical to the fore most directly. He presents a lecture on his theories of sexual intermediacy illustrated by photos of masculine women and feminine men, their often naked bodies offering graphic depictions of the purportedly biological and embodied nature of sexuality and sexual difference. Hirschfeld stresses that these intermediate types are part of the rich diversity of nature, and that their criminalisation and stigmatisation, not they themselves, are at the root of the 'problem' of homosexuality.¹⁴⁹ Hirschfeld also intervenes after Körner's death. The despairing Sivvers himself considers suicide as a result; Hirschfeld's character urges him instead to follow Zola's example and fight for human rights, his reference to the Dreyfus Affair suggesting links between homophobia and anti-Semitism. Indeed, conservative opposition to the film itself featured strong anti-Semitic elements.

Different from the Others became a particular lightning rod for conservatives arguing for the re-introduction of censorship.¹⁵⁰ The art historian Konrad Lange condemned its 'racially alien [*rassefremder*] viewers' in 1920,¹⁵¹ while Pastor Martin Cornils, the chair of the Committee for the Protection of Youth in Film Theatres, wondered a year earlier if the new censorship law was enough to control the 'pathologically degenerate people' who had produced the film, or if more stringent government control over the film industry,

149 As Ramsey 2008 pp. 91–92 notes, a number of homosexual rights advocates rejected this reading of sexuality, and especially the focus on effeminate men by Hirschfeld's *Wissenschaftlich-humanitäres Komitee* (Scientific-Humanitarian Committee). Both the more liberal *Bund für Menschenrecht* (League for Human Rights) and the right-wing *Gemeinschaft der Eigenen* (Community of the Self-Owned) argued otherwise, the latter of which looking instead to a classical Greek model of male homosociality and eros. In his speech in the film and elsewhere, it should be noted, Hirschfeld did somewhat qualify his claims by stressing that feminine men were not necessarily homosexual.

150 For a detailed discussion of the censorship debates around the film, see Steakley 1999. In *From Caligari to Hitler*, Kracauer 1947 suggests that the 'sex films' were a response to the 'primitive needs arising in all belligerent countries after the war' (p. 45), and that their impact was solely reactionary, diverting attention away from political action. He singles out *Different from the Others* and other films dealing with homosexuality, demonstrating in the process that homophobic sentiment was not the preserve of the right: 'they capitalized on the noisy resonance of Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld's campaign against Paragraph 175 of the penal code which exacted punishment for certain abnormal sex practices' (p. 45).

151 Lange 1990, p. 29. Lange rejected the notion that film could be art, seeing it as a medium of technological reproducibility that needed to be judged on the basis of its pedagogical function (for a discussion of his views, see Möhl 1923a, p. 4).

including nationalisation, was necessary.¹⁵² The film's frank depiction of homosexuality and its clear advocacy of decriminalisation, coupled with the quality of its production, contributed to its prominence. It could not be dismissed as easily as the low-budget quickies that had come to dominate the *Aufklärungsfilm* market, but by the same token the seriousness of its argument made it more of a potential threat. Soon after the introduction of censorship the film was banned; one of the expert evaluators on the censorship panel was the conservative psychiatrist Emil Kraepelin, who we have encountered earlier polemicising against and incarcerating the left in Munich during the revolutionary period.¹⁵³ Several years later, in 1926, the social hygienist Albert Moll continued to inveigh against the film's potential impact on youth. 'If homosexuality is shown in romanticised form to 19–20 year old youth, which is what happened in this film strip, even if not true such immature bodies will be confused and they will consider homosexuality as something particularly desirable'.¹⁵⁴ The fact that the film continued to stoke debate so many years later highlights its enduring impact.

The way in which censorship laws were configured spoke to the complexities generated by a film like *Different from the Others*. First and foremost, the controversies around the film point to the extent to which, as is generally the case with censorship regimes, marginalised forms of social and sexual life were disproportionately targeted. How that censorship was implemented varied in instructive ways. In the case of the *Lichtspielgesetz* the censorship board was given a number of options in dealing with films that it deemed to be objectionable. It could ban the films, restrict them to adult viewers, or impose other restrictions on viewership. This last proviso entailed two criteria: the scientific and the artistic. As Moll had argued of *Different from the Others*, it was precisely the broad nature of film's audience, their 'immaturity', that made the medium so dangerous.¹⁵⁵ Films that could claim a scientific and/or artistic merit were therefore deemed suitable only for the presumably less malleable audiences of scientists, artists, or other intellectuals. This is precisely what the censors

152 Cornils 1990, p. 30. Nationalisation was a dream of cultural conservatives, although of course the grounds of their argument and what they hoped to achieve by it were dramatically different from left advocates of nationalisation in the USPD.

153 Steakley 1999, p. 192. Kraepelin believed that homosexuality, like shell shock and other nervous disorders, could be cured by hypnosis, a position that, needless to say, Hirschfeld rejected. This approach (and its failure) is depicted in the film as a desperate Körner unsuccessfully tries this treatment.

154 Moll 1926, p. 1103.

155 Moll 1926, pp. 1102–1106.

determined for *Different from the Others*; it was not banned outright, but the board restricted its viewing to 'scientific' audiences.¹⁵⁶

The law thus set up a hierarchy of audiences in which levels of education, linked of course with class, were key. The scientific and artistic accomplishments of the *Bildungsbürgertum*, as well as the moral values bound up with notions of *Kultur*, ensured that these viewers could approach questionable material with the proper critical distance. Other audiences needed to be protected. An official commentary on the censorship process made clear the centrality of the audience: '[t]he content of the film itself is the object of the examination [of the censorship board] only insofar as it enables conclusions to be drawn about the projected impact of its showing on viewers'.¹⁵⁷ Censors, coming primarily from the educated bourgeoisie, thus made their decisions based on an imagined audience reaction; that implied audience was precisely the primitive audience discussed above.¹⁵⁸

Agitation for state censorship was supplemented by a number of groups beyond the film reformers and political parties. Conservative women's groups fought to strengthen and expand oversight over cultural production in the name of public morality and hygiene. As we have seen throughout the book, radical right male activists also often attacked 'unhealthy' forms of culture, which often meant left culture as well. By the later Weimar years these attacks were frequent and direct, with showings of films like the pacifist *All Quiet on the Western Front* or *Kuhle Wampe*, the left-wing film in which Bertolt Brecht played a key role, targeted. Screenings were disrupted by right-wing thugs, with Alfred Döblin writing in *Der Film* in 1930 that '[t]he banning of the Remarque

156 Steakley 1999, pp. 192–93. The censors in fact refused to take a position on the scientific merits of the arguments presented in the film, but rather allowed its limited release as a significant documentary record of an important time in German history.

157 Quoted in Kopf 2003, p. 453.

158 An interesting example of these debates came with one of the more popular of the educational films, Hanns Walter Kornblum's 1922 film *The Basic Principles of Einstein's Theory of Relativity* that sought to make this revolutionary scientific development accessible to a lay audience. A number of conservative commentators rejected the notion of relativity outright, their scientific arguments embedded in an anti-Semitic denunciation of Einstein that stressed his pacifist and left-leaning politics. Already before the War, Ernst Gehrcke, the most prominent critic of the theory, had called it an instance of 'mass suggestion', its popularity ascribable to the unwarranted press it received. He renewed this attack in the wake of the film's success, bringing together conservative fears of film's hypnotic power with an anti-Semitically oriented nationalist rejection of a perceived relativism that was part and parcel of the degenerative nature of modernity (see Wazeck 2010, pp. 174–75).

film [*All Quiet*] means a sensational political victory for the radical right'.¹⁵⁹ The police often remained passive or even co-operated with these attacks, and in rural areas and more conservative regions like Bavaria, local police used their power to restrict or ban films that were deemed objectionable, even after they had passed the censorship board.

Films were a prominent target of social hygienic and right-wing movements in large part because they were symbolically and materially bound up with the social changes associated with modern, urban life. However, mobilisations against *Schund und Schmutz* (trash and dirt) extended to all areas of mass and commercial cultural production. Cabaret and variety shows ranging from semi-illicit revues to large-scale spectacles like those of the Tiller Girls were key targets because they combined a mass character with perceived sexual and gender transgressions.¹⁶⁰ Films depicting these shows and venues as degenerate thus strengthened these conservative forces. An especially prominent target of morality campaigns were advertisements for birth control and abortion that were commonly found in the media; here the campaign against dirt and trash intervened directly in the reproductive life of the nation, with contestations over reproductive rights gaining great prominence in the period, a theme to which I will return in the next chapter.¹⁶¹

The exploding market for pulp fiction presented another challenge to reformers. Once again it was literature consumed by marginalised groups, in particular the gay and lesbian themed culture discussed earlier, that provoked the strongest anxiety. Many on the left shared a sense of the danger of this pulp fiction. The KPD critic Gertrud Alexander rejected it as cheap literature that 'corrupts the spirit and character of the youth'.¹⁶² Alexander's concern was less about immorality per se, and more about the impact trashy literature would have in suppressing the emergence of an authentic working-class consciousness and the new communist-oriented youth publishing effort she supported. Photography, whether in the form of snapshots, postcards, or in publications, was another medium that attracted significant attention. Authorities were especially concerned with the spread of cheap cards and postcards, often depicting cabaret and other performers, that they considered pornographic; it was especially these cheap mass productions, available to working-class

159 Döblin 1972b, p. 258.

160 Already in 1902, the radical right author Arthur Moeller van den Bruck commented in his book *Das Variété* that 'if our age has a style at all, then it must be a vaudeville-style [*Variétéstil*]' (quoted in Jelavich 1993, p. 25).

161 Woycke 1988 offers numerous examples of these advertisements.

162 Alexander 1924b.

consumers, that were deemed to have no 'artistic merit', and hence should be controlled.¹⁶³

Content was important in these cases but, as with film, it was the mass basis of the medium's audience that was especially significant and that attracted the greatest attention. Class was at the heart of these debates. This was most evident in the 1926 Law for the Protection of Youth. Churches were especially prominent in promoting the law, although coalitions of groups concerned with social hygiene also played a major role. While both the KPD and the SPD opposed the law in the Reichstag, it passed, setting the criteria for censorship decisions and establishing the institutions through which this would take place.¹⁶⁴ As with film or photography, 'artistic' or 'scientific' criteria were especially important. Thus, an expensive 'artistic' book of nude photographs like *The Erotic in Photography* that referenced aesthetic, sociological, and medical conceptions of the nude was permitted while other, cheaper and more popular works were banned. Even those who argued against censorship frequently endorsed these classed distinctions. The journalist Clara Höfer-Abeking, for example, defended an artistic collection of nude photos in 1924 by arguing that 'it isn't only the attraction of the body as such that is being depicted, but the body as the temple of the soul, as the expression of the spiritual'.¹⁶⁵ The implication was that other forms of representation were merely bodily, a distinction that mapped directly onto dominant conceptions of the working class for whom the spiritual realm remained inaccessible.

One interesting aspect of these debates is that while, as we saw in the last chapter, artists like Dix or Grosz were charged with obscenity for purportedly

163 Jelavich 1993, pp. 161–63 gives an example of how this played out in practice, highlighting the intersections of class and aesthetic judgment in censorship decisions. In a trial against the prominent Ballet Celly de Rheidt, which sold pictures, some nude, of its performers, the judge found the smaller, poor quality postcards (available to a mass audience) to be obscene given their lack of artistic value. Two larger, higher quality photographs (less affordable to the working class) were spared this verdict because of their perceived greater artistic value.

164 For a discussion of the law, see Peterson 1992; Stieg 1990. Birett 1995 reproduces the secret lists of banned or restricted books distributed to state and police officials. Other lists were also produced more locally, and for the use of booksellers and others to ensure their compliance with the law. 'Lack of awareness of the law', argued one, 'is not a defense against punishment' (*Liste der Schund- und Schmutzschriften* 1931, p. 3).

165 Quoted in Schmidt-Linsenhoff 1989, p. 125. This notion of the body as the expression of the soul resonated widely in the period. As I will discuss later in the chapter, we find these themes in the Body Culture movements that gained significant prominence in the Weimar period, but also in the racial science whose influence was likewise on the rise.

attacking the state or religious institutions, artists were not necessarily militant in opposing censorship. They frequently shared a suspicion of the crass nature of mass culture and the distinctions between art and kitsch upon which the law was founded. Alfred Döblin, a prominent case in point, was initially much more concerned with ensuring that 'art' remained exempt from censorship than opposing censorship on principle, although by 1930 he began to question the special status of art, arguing that artists should join the broader struggle against censorship.¹⁶⁶

It was especially among the more politically active cultural left, who tended towards the KPD, that opposition was the strongest. On 10 September 1926 leftist publishers, including Malik-Verlag's Wieland Herzfelde, put on an event to protest the law. Egon Erwin Kisch also offered a scathing indictment of the law that, he argued, reflected the spirit of the police. Invoking prior experiences with censorship, he wondered how much worse things might become with the law in place given that George Grosz, Erich Mühsam, Berta Lask, Ernst Toller, and so many others had previously been charged in the absence of one. Crucially, Kisch sought to shift the terms of the debate, arguing that the concern with 'immorality' deliberately shifted attention away from truly shameful events like the murders of Liebknecht, Luxemburg, and others on the left. This was the real *Schund und Schmutz*, he argued. If anything should be banned it was things like the 'authoritarian benevolence in schoolbooks' or 'pseudo-romantic military and monarchical histories'. The law as it stood was about the 'gagging of the spirit, it is about the defence of lies against truth'.¹⁶⁷

The comparison drawn by Kisch to the murders of left-wing activists was not mere hyperbole. Censorship fit into a broader pattern in which the actions of the left were policed much differently than others, including the radical right. (As was shown, this was strongly the case in the events of the post-War revolutionary period.) Kisch recognised the extent to which left cultural production was vulnerable in this sense, basing his opposition to censorship on very different grounds than the abstract notions of freedom underpinning liberal positions. As the growing scope and impact of censorship practices became clearer, however, even left-liberal writers and artists began to speak out more forcefully. The film critic Kurt Pinthus, for example, argued in 1931 that: '[t]he cultural disgrace is no longer about [film] production, but about censorship'.¹⁶⁸

166 See Döblin 1982a for his earlier position, and Döblin 1982b for his later.

167 Kisch 1983, p. 14.

168 'Untergang des Films durch Zensur!' in Pinthus 2008, p. 286. He was commenting here on the banning of the film *Lied vom Leben*, mentioning as well the censoring of *Im Westen nichts Neues* and *Dreigroschenoper*.

The growing opposition to censorship and the support for independent cinema was reflected in the formation of the 'German League for Independent Film' in 1930. Founding members included Hans Richter, Mies van der Rohe, Lotte Reiniger, and Walter Ruttmann. The group put on talks and other events while seeking to maintain a non-party stance of opposition to censorship.¹⁶⁹ Such approaches did not convince everyone on the left, with Brecht arguing that this kind of intellectual defence of 'art' against the 'morality' of the censors simply counterposed two bourgeois concerns. In order to hold a truly revolutionary stance '[t]hey would have to be able to desire political art not for artistic but for political reasons'.¹⁷⁰ As we shall see in the next chapter, Brecht was one of those on the left who sought to produce this new political art.

For bourgeois reformers, this notion of art as political was firmly rejected. Art was outside politics and the scope of mass culture. As Walter Rathenau put it, invoking a common critique of mass culture, '[a]rt has nothing to do with entertainment. Art enriches the soul, entertainment deceptively conceals one's poverty from oneself'.¹⁷¹ This notion of artistic enrichment had much to do with the traditions of *Bildung* discussed in earlier chapters, the bourgeois ideal of a cultured education and personal development. The working class in particular was seen as lacking this culture, leading Theodor Hueß of the liberal German Democratic Party to call for a 'social policy of the soul'.¹⁷² Hueß's focus on social policy suggests that the rather nineteenth-century sentiment underlying Rathenau's position was undergoing a shift. The idea of *Bildung*, as I have argued earlier, was being transformed through its integration into state-driven practices of social hygiene. If the language of the soul was still preferred by some, it was increasingly the body that was read as the expression of that soul and as the point at which intervention took place. Social policy also implied an interest in positive forms of intervention rather than simply the prohibitions characteristic of censorship. The question for film reformers, then, was whether or not film itself could be mobilised in the interests of social hygiene.

While Richard Oswald remained one of the more controversial makers of *Aufklärungsfilme*, he justified his approach precisely through the language of

169 Hagener 2007, pp. 101–2. It was not only on the left that arguments against censorship arose. The literary section of the Prussian Academy of Art, for example, intervened in Reichstag debates over censorship in early 1929 to argue that censorship would only put unwanted literature in the spotlight. Censorship, they argued, 'brings new discord and partisan politics into our cultural life!' (quoted in D. Ulrich, 1929, p. 5).

170 'The Threepenny Lawsuit', in Brecht 2000, p. 176.

171 Quoted in Müller 1994, p. 201.

172 Quoted in Saldern 2002, p. 269.

social hygiene. Discussing his films on prostitution, he argued that '[w]hen one shows a prostitute [*Dirne*] in film, one must thus portray her as a prostitute, presenting her as a deterrent, warning any girl who perhaps is in danger of going astray'.¹⁷³ His argument was perhaps self-serving in seeking to deflect criticism, similar in this respect to the defence we saw Otto Dix mount in the last chapter, but it also reflected a growing sense of the pedagogical potential of new media. Some film reformers, as Uli Jung points out, were in fact often ambivalent about censorship and policing, arguing that the production of a healthy alternative cinema was ultimately more valuable.¹⁷⁴ They therefore promoted a documentary film movement geared to the production of what were called *Kulturfilme* (culture films) or *Lehrfilme* (education films).¹⁷⁵

Kracauer suggested perceptively in 1925 that in fact *Bildungsfilme* would be a better name for them than the other two options.¹⁷⁶ These films took a more sober approach to their subject matter, challenging the overt sexuality and sensationalism of the *Aufklärungsfilme* or *Schundfilme* (trashy films) that the censorship laws were designed to repress, although, as the case of Oswald's films suggests, these borders remained fluid and contested. Hans Cürlis, the conservative head of the Association of German Education and Culture Film Producers, argued in 1930 that film's 'general task is of an educational nature and for national cultural development'.¹⁷⁷ Edgar Beyfuß and Alex Kossowsky's edited collection *The Culture Film Book* (*Das Kulturfilmbuch*), from 1924, reflected the broad interest in this kind of film, presenting articles from government officials, film industry luminaries including directors like Oswald and Fritz Lang, as well as other film activists. Actors were also included, most notably Asta Nielsen, whose frequent portrayals of prostitutes and other 'at risk' characters made her one of the most prominent stars of the period. The potential of *Kulturfilm*, the editors argued, was 'as bearer and medium for a more noble, higher culture'.¹⁷⁸

173 Oswald 1924, p. 104.

174 Jung 2005, pp. 333–36.

175 The terrain designated by the two terms overlaps significantly. Education films could be described as those that were more explicitly pedagogical in their approach, with culture films including a broader range of approaches, but the terms were often used to describe the same films. In what follows, I will tend to use them synonymously along with the English 'documentary film', but when discussing specific authors will use the term they favour.

176 'Die Kulturfilmgemeinde Frankfurt' in Kracauer 2004, 6.1, p. 179.

177 Cürlis 1930, p. 5.

178 Beyfuß and Kossowsky 1924, p. vii.

The film industry was of course concerned over the potential impact of censorship and state control on rates of profit and their ability to expand, although they were willing to self-censor to a degree in order to limit direct state intervention. If economic arguments were paramount for film companies, it was the social role of these films that was stressed by others. In a 1924 article, for instance, Friedrich Möhl drew on themes we saw in earlier chapters, such as the distinctions between Culture (*Kultur*) and Civilisation (*Zivilisation*), to suggest that film offered a powerful mechanism for national regeneration. 'Photography and moving photography, cinematography, is without a doubt a *civilising* tool of the highest order; however, it will only become a *cultural tool* and an art when it facilitates our ascent from Civilisation to Culture, that is, when it improves our *knowledge* of the spiritual and moral contexts and goals of life, strengthens our *will* to turn this knowledge into good and beautiful acts, and when finally, of its many tasks, that it establishes a congruence and unity between our personality and the best and most noble goals; – this unity, this harmony, is that which we call *Beauty*'.¹⁷⁹ This heady sense of film's potential suggested that it could in fact fulfil Rathenau's definition of art. Indeed, Möhl's description is especially significant in that it does not situate beauty, that crucial aesthetic category, in the work itself. Film is a medium for the production of a higher aesthetic unity, an integration of the individual into the social totality. For all its airy language, there is something profoundly technocratic in Möhl's reading.

As mentioned in the second chapter, documentary film had already been promoted during the War, with newsreels and other shorts shown before some of the most widely seen features. During the Weimar years a range of shorts and feature documentaries were produced, some for commercial release, others shown primarily in schools or other educational contexts. What is crucial to keep in mind is that while the pedagogical impulse behind documentary film was widely shared, the educational task was interpreted in many ways. These documentaries were produced by a range of state and non-governmental people and organisations with diverging interests and political perspectives and were thus ideologically and aesthetically heterogeneous. Even Ufa, the company that produced the most documentaries, went through various incarnations. Initially a state and military institution, it was then privatised, eventually ending up as part of the radical right media magnate Alfred Hugenberg's empire in 1927. Ufa's *Kulturabteilung* (culture department) responsible for documentary film production was established during the War, and remained a division of the company after its privatisation. Especially under Edgar Beyfuß's

179 Möhl 1923a, p. 5.

leadership in the mid-1920s the *Kulturabteilung* also provided a temporary home for many avant-garde and experimental filmmakers;¹⁸⁰ educational films about the coal industry were thus produced alongside abstract experimental works. In the case of Ufa or other film companies, the productions were often funded in part by the state or other organisations in addition to the companies themselves. For example, as we saw in the second chapter, Oswald's *Let There Be Light!* was produced in association with the DGBG. With Hugenberg's takeover of Ufa, however, the *Kulturabteilung*, renamed the *Ufa-Kulturfilmherstellung*, was expected to produce for the market, and the onset of the Depression further limited the scope for the production of what were generally money-losing films.¹⁸¹

Part of the remit of these films was ostensibly to enact a properly scientific perspective on natural and social phenomena, but also to develop a filmmaking practice that established the medium itself as legitimate in the face of critics. Thus, for Schweisheimer, film's value lay in the one quality that the press or other media lacked: 'visual clarity [*Anschaulichkeit*]'.¹⁸² Proponents of the *Kultur-* and *Lehrfilme* rejected the argument that the medium itself produced degenerative effects. The doctor A.H. Kober, for example, accepted the links between film and modern life, but argued that film could not by itself be held responsible for crime. There were many factors: 'big city, environment, food crises, war, and, in these broader contexts, everything that one understands by modern civilisation, naturally including theatre and film'.¹⁸³ This insight did not prevent Kober from focusing his own research, which involved extensive interviews with police officials, on the impacts of the medium on youth and working-class audiences. Felix Lampe likewise held the view that the destabilising tempo of film and the passive orientation of the viewer condemned by opponents was not inherent to the medium, but was rather a function of bad filmmaking. Depending on the context and content, he argued, books and still images could do as much damage.¹⁸⁴ Lampe's views were especially important because he led the Prussian Central Institute for Education and Teaching and headed the censorship committee of the Ministry of the Interior that vetted films. His support of film's potential did not mean that Lampe was a generous

180 Beyfuß also introduced the Absolute Film programme in 1925 and was involved in organising the *Film und Foto* exhibit in Stuttgart in 1929, both, as noted earlier, prominent venues for avant-garde filmmakers.

181 Kreimeier 2005, pp. 84–85.

182 Schweisheimer 1920, p. 4.

183 Kober 1921, p. 10.

184 Lampe 1921.

censor, however; his committee was frequently the target of complaints for its 'one-sided and often dictatorial view'.¹⁸⁵

Lampe and others thus offered an alternative conservative critique of what he called 'film culture', which included everything from content to political economy.¹⁸⁶ While film could be dangerous, Lampe argued, *Kulturfilm* also offered social hygienic possibilities tied especially to the development of new ways of seeing. The 'Lampe Committee' thus sought to ground consideration of film on a scientific basis in which educational film was strictly delimited from mere entertainment, his committee having the controversial power to grant exemption from the entertainment tax for films deemed to be artistic or educational.¹⁸⁷ Curt Thomalla strove to apply these medico-scientific principles systematically in his work in the field. Thomalla was head of the medical film archives at Ufa's *Kulturabteilung*,¹⁸⁸ and was especially worried that while educated viewers rightly tended to shun the kitsch produced by the film industry, the 'judgmentless masses' did not. In Thomalla's view it was wrong to imagine that detective or romantic films could be made to convey a social hygienic message to this primitive audience: '[t]he only way out is a strictly objective *Lehrfilm* without frivolous elements [*Spielhandlung*], and that the educated [*Gebildete*] will watch and, because of its theme, will also attract wider social strata'.¹⁸⁹

Thomalla suggested a number of examples of films that met his criteria, including the 1922 *Steinach-film* in which he was involved.¹⁹⁰ The film was a prominent example of the educational film genre, dealing like *Different from the Others* with issues of sexuality. However, it took a dramatically different approach from the latter film, presenting homosexuality and transvestism as biological illnesses that required medical intervention, a perspective also evident in *False Shame* (1926), a film on syphilis written by Thomalla.¹⁹¹ These differences were especially evident in the deployment of 'science'. Not only was Thomalla's biologically-determinist reading of sexuality very different from Hirschfeld's emphasis on social stigmatisation and marginalisation, but the

185 Kalbus 1924a, p. 11.

186 Lampe 1924.

187 See Rudolf Arnheim's scathing critique of Lampe's committee in 'Film and Its Stepmother' [1929], in Arnheim 1997, pp. 89–92.

188 Kreimeier 2005, p. 77–81.

189 Thomalla 1922a, p. 16 (this is the first of a four-part series of articles in *Der Lehrfilm*). Like Cürliis, Thomalla stressed that lack of funding is a significant part of the problem in fulfilling the potential of educational film (see Thomalla 1923, pp. 19–20).

190 Thomalla 1922b and 1922c.

191 For a description of *Steinach-film*, see Schmidt 2000, p. 34; on *False Shame*, see p. 28.

form of the two films was also dramatically different. Thomalla rejected the use of the dramatic form of *Different from the Others* as he contended it threatened to overwhelm and manipulate easily impressionable audiences, arguing for a strictly documentary aesthetic reflective of scientific objectivity. Despite this approach, however, and the conservative conception of sexuality evident in *Steinach-film*, it still faced difficulties with the censors who maintained that mass audiences could not necessarily be trusted to view the film outside of controlled contexts.¹⁹² The censors were quite aware that audiences could produce their own unauthorised meanings.

While film reformers like Thomalla fought against any attempt to introduce 'entertainment' into educational films, other supporters of the genre took a somewhat different stance. Schweisheimer, for instance, supported documentary's pedagogical goals, but he questioned the efficacy of the 'pure' *Lehrfilm*. Like Lampe, he drew a strong distinction between true hygiene films and pornographic films (*Animierfilme*). Oswald's *Es werde Licht!* was an example of the former, but the sequel, *Prostitution*, was an example of the descent into pornography. What Schweisheimer found most significant about *Es werde Licht!*, however, was its popularity. It was precisely its entertainment value – the power of the dramatic genre in this case – that was crucial to its success.¹⁹³ 'The greatest enemy of mass education', he contended, 'is the deadly boredom that floods over the viewer, who is never to return'.¹⁹⁴ While great care was needed to balance entertainment and education, both elements were absolutely necessary. Censorship boards thus could not simply be made up of doctors and other social hygiene experts, but needed the involvement of filmmakers as well. Only this could ensure healthy film production governed by two guiding principles: 'a sense of responsibility and no boredom!'¹⁹⁵ Striking a proper balance was by no means easy, however, especially given the unruly contexts of film spectatorship in ordinary theatres. 'A requirement of the film must be that the spiritual attitude of the viewer is not disturbed'.¹⁹⁶

192 For accounts of the censorship process surrounding the film, see Kalbus 1924b; *Der Lehrfilm* 1922. The film critic Kurt Pinthus was one of the censorship board members who dissented from the decision to restrict access to the film. For his account, see 'Der Steinach-Film', in Pinthus 2008, pp. 141–42. Kalbus also notes the difficulty in finding international markets, although he says that the 'less cultivated' countries like Russia and Poland were the most open to these controversial topics (pp. 227–28), an interesting claim given the very different political climates in the two countries.

193 Schweisheimer 1921, pp. 20–21. On dramatic film, see Schweisheimer 1920, pp. 11–16.

194 Schweisheimer 1921, p. 21.

195 Schweisheimer 1921, p. 21.

196 Schweisheimer 1920, p. 43.

The problem of the balance between entertainment and education ran through the debates over *Kultur-* and *Lehrfilme*. To control the audience films were brought to youth in schools or, as with the Association of Art and Youth in Frankfurt, were shown in controlled settings. Kracauer's account of the Association's screenings describes programmes of nature films, but also a heavy dose of colonial travel films, suggesting again the importance of colonial nostalgia in the period and the doubled nature of the 'primitive' audience.¹⁹⁷ Simply showing youth these films was not enough according to Beyfuß, who argued that schools needed to teach about film in the same way they did about art or literature; he lamented the lack of materials available for this.¹⁹⁸ Educational use of film met with limited success, however, in part because distribution generally depended not on commercial mechanisms, but on the resources of volunteer or state organisations. To try to mitigate the unprofitability of the genre, in the mid-1920s Ufa began to produce multiple versions of films, scientifically-oriented for universities, educationally-oriented for schools, and a popular (and hopefully profitable) version for cinemas.¹⁹⁹ For its part, the state sought to provide financial support by reducing the 'amusement tax' assessed against commercial film, although, as noted earlier, this required the approval of the Lampe Committee. Despite these efforts, in 1930 Hans Cürlis was still lamenting the relative failure of films produced directly for the educational system. While lack of state funding contributed to this failure, he argued that education and entertainment should not be seen simply as opposing principles; educational filmmakers needed to incorporate entertainment value into production, and commercial film, especially advertising and promotional films, could serve as a model for educational films.²⁰⁰

Unsurprisingly, commercial directors went even further in promoting the educational value of entertainment. In his contribution to Beyfuß and Kossowski's book, Richard Oswald argued that *Kulturfilme* could simply be defined as films that were educational, regardless of their form or genre. In fact, 'a film that presents this education not as education, and so is not presented officially on screen as a *Kulturfilm*, will quite possibly exert a stronger effect on the public than an official *Kulturfilm*.'²⁰¹ The director Max Mack's defence of entertainment drew on arguments over the changing nature of work and

197 'Die Filmveranstaltungen von "Kunst und Jugend"' [1924], in Kracauer 2004, 6.1, pp. 60–64.

198 Beyfuß 1924. He cites Balázs' *Visible Man* as one of the notable exceptions (p. 71).

199 Kreimeier 2005, pp. 83–84.

200 Cürlis n.d., pp. 6–9, 17–18.

201 Oswald 1924, p. 103.

leisure. The intensity of modern labour, he suggested, meant that the audience 'seeks to soothe their nerves quickly and softly, to trigger a relatively shallow arousal, and to leave undisturbed all the mental energies that are used and exhausted during the work day'.²⁰² Film itself thus served a hygienic function, but the lengthy scientific lectures that often accompanied educational films undermined this potential. 'One must be familiar with the wishes of the public, the world of its imagination and wants, in order to bring them important but unconscious pedagogical elements'.²⁰³

Mack offers little by way of social critique, but his conception of the changing nature of work and leisure echoes in some respects the arguments we saw earlier from Kracauer and others. Rudolf Kurtz took up this argument in describing film's physiological function in the structuring of labour and leisure in a capitalist economy, but offered a critical analysis of this integrated totality:

The use of strength during the day and the systematic breakdown of the cells demands a shift towards the reconstruction of cells in the evening's break from work, to be completed during sleep. This process of regeneration demands a state of mental relaxation usually accompanied by a sensation of emptiness. This is where film comes in. It establishes new conditions for physiological renewal... that can be so easily taken up that hardly any or at most minimal active mental exertions are needed... The effortless apperception of film is thus a fundamental prerequisite of film. The viewer must be able to absorb the experiential content of the film smoothly into their worldview without this act producing any form of mental activity.²⁰⁴

This industrial film, as he calls it, is characterised by its commodity form, but also by its integration into the totality of industrial society. The value of Expressionist and Absolute film for Kurtz lies precisely in its disruption of these seamless circuits of cultural production and consumption.

The prominent leftist film critic Rudolf Arnheim gave a similar account, configuring film viewing as the leisure form of alienated labour, a condition that blocked the purported aim of educational film; the people 'can be educated, but not these days – not so long as the work needed to earn their daily bread

²⁰² Mack 1919, p. 117.

²⁰³ Mack 1919, p. 120. Even Thomalla, who stressed the importance of a scientific approach to the *Lehrfilm*, acknowledged that the practice of lecturing to audiences was counter-productive (see Thomalla 1923, pp. 19–20).

²⁰⁴ Kurtz 1926, p. 126.

is either nonexistent or so overtaxing that the worker drops dead tired into bed at night. The discovery of living photography, of an easily manufactured picture of reality, fit in perfectly with the legitimate need of the unemployed, from the messenger boy up to the factory director, for distraction and amusement... Everywhere that there had been words – that is, thoughts – there was now raw, pointless viewing'.²⁰⁵ What for Mack was film's 'therapeutic' value, a positive process of regeneration in which education was subconscious, becomes here the marker of its integration into wholly alienated forms of life in which any pedagogical possibility has been subsumed into an industrial, capitalist logic. For those bourgeois commentators who endorsed film on precisely these grounds, the therapeutic value of entertainment meant that the educational film movement as a whole was on the wrong track; an exemplary article in the liberal film magazine *Lichtbild-Bühne*, proclaimed: '[b]an political films from the movie theater!... They poison cinema's atmosphere of pure entertainment'.²⁰⁶

These debates mirror the broader arguments over degeneration that animated Weimar culture. Underlying the *Kultur-* and *Lehrfilm* movements was the hope that a social hygienic filmmaking could reshape the primitive audience at the level of the individual and collective body. The concern with the body was perhaps most famously evident in the film *Ways to Strength and Beauty*, released in 1924 by Ufa's *Kulturabteilung*. That film was distinguished from the majority of documentary films by its frank and explicit depiction of the body, an approach that was shaped by its deep engagement with the Life Reform (*Lebensreform*) and Body Culture (*Körperkultur*) movements that gained great prominence in the Weimar period.²⁰⁷ These movements promoted 'healthy living' in many forms, focusing especially on the positive impact of physical

205 'The Sad Future of Film', in Arnheim 1997, p. 11. These kinds of critique anticipate the culture industry argument put forward later by Horkheimer and Adorno. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment* they argue that '[e]ntertainment is the prolongation of work under late capitalism. It is sought by those who want to escape the mechanized labor process so that they can cope with it again. At the same time, however, mechanization has such power over leisure and its happiness, determines so thoroughly the fabrication of entertainment commodities, that the off-duty worker can experience nothing but after-images of the work process itself. The ostensible content is merely a faded foreground; what is imprinted is the automated sequence of standardized tasks. The only escape from the work process in factory and office is through adaptation to it in leisure time. This is the incurable sickness of all entertainment' (2002, p. 109).

206 Quoted in Murray 1990, p. 68.

207 *Strength and Beauty* (*Kraft und Schönheit*) was the title of a prominent Life Reform journal published between 1901 and 1927.

activity and a return to nature on individual and collective bodies. Nudism, hiking, gymnastics, dance, vegetarianism, sunbathing, alternative medicine, and a host of other activities were associated with these groups, each offering a response to the degenerative impacts of modern life.²⁰⁸

Life Reform and Body Culture movements had a huge influence in the period, although their relationship to medical, psychiatric, and other scientific practices that sought to establish authority over questions of national health was ambivalent. Life Reform movements frequently challenged medical approaches, and medical authorities in turn sought to limit their influence, although often this meant co-opting concepts and approaches from life reform.²⁰⁹ Complicating matters further was the ideological heterogeneity of Life Reform. While many Life Reform groups were on the right (the title *Ways to Strength and Beauty* likely suggests Nazi rhetoric to the contemporary reader, although this was not the political orientation of the film itself), the movement spanned the political spectrum. Thus, organisations like the *Friends of Nature* (*Naturfreunde*) were primarily proletarian in composition, and included both SPD- and KPD-affiliated members.²¹⁰

Ways to Strength and Beauty was especially interested in the body culture aspects of Life Reform, and the film's approach makes clear the extent to which conceptions of the body were bound up with aesthetic ideals. This was most evident in the film's fascination with classical Greek bodily ideals, an interest that it shared not only with the Life Reform movement as a whole but, as we shall see, with racial science. Indeed, the film's depiction of those Greek ideals was profoundly racialised, the health of the German body conceived of in terms of whiteness. This mirrored the Life Reform notion that the skin was a text from which health and illness could be read, a membrane mediating the relationship between inside and outside.²¹¹ Especially in nudist culture, *pale* white skin was seen as a marker of degenerate Civilisation (*Zivilisation*) produced especially by the modern forms of white-collar labour discussed

208 On different aspects of Life Reform movements, see Fritzen 2006; Grisko 1999; Hau 2003, pp. 176–98; Möhring 2005; Wedemeyer-Kolwe 2005. Fritzen argues that Life Reform is best characterised as a network made up of interconnecting approaches, individual people, associations and societies, publications, institutions, and other elements linked primarily by a shared concern with the impacts of 'modernity' (pp. 28–64); these networks interconnected more broadly with the many reform movements in all areas of social life that were so prominent in the Weimar period (for an overview of the proliferating movements, see Kerbs and Reulecke 1998).

209 Hau 2003, pp. 126–35.

210 Williams 2011; Denecke 1991.

211 Fritzen 2006, pp. 237–38.

by Kracauer. Tanned white skin marked one as a healthy cultured person (*Kultur Mensch*), and offered protection against such afflictions as tuberculosis, rickets, and syphilis.²¹²

The film presents a powerful visual argument in favour of the ideals of Life Reform. It begins with a passage from Goethe extolling Greek virtues, an intertitle then suggesting that 'perfect harmony was the goal of the culture of antiquity. For the ancient Greeks, the body was as important as the mind'. This, the film contends, is no longer the case. 'Not everyone today is well-built, nor is everyone strong, but all are nervous'. The comparative framework of the film is thus set; the way to healthy *modern* bodies, to strength and beauty, runs through classical ideals. A publicity brochure for the film proclaimed its value in the 'regeneration of the human race'.²¹³ Body culture thus represents a therapeutic response to the endemic nervousness of modern life that, the film implies, is the condition of the audience. The Greek body is staged at different points in the film through *tableaux vivants*, a staple of body culture practices.²¹⁴ These 'Greek' bodies are in fact based on Greek sculpture, the aesthetic ideal of classical art thus coming to stand in for the ideal body. The film was not without controversy given the prominence it gave to the nude body, but its scientific rhetoric and its claim to an artistic representation served as defences against charges of impropriety.²¹⁵ Kracauer's response in 1924 to the film's initial release took up this theme, arguing in a review that in depicting the body as movement and rhythm, nakedness served no prurient interest. Thus, 'viewing of the film should also be permitted for youth', and it should in fact be shown in schools and cities all over Germany.²¹⁶ The film's pedagogical and hygienic value, Kracauer argued, lay especially in its juxtaposition of healthy and unhealthy bodies, juxtapositions made possible by film's technical characteristics.

Nudity in the film provided the link between the Greek ideal and the German present. Weimar nudist (*Naktkultur*), or 'free body culture' (*Freikörperkultur*, FKK), movements more generally made extensive use of nude images in

²¹² Ross 2005, pp. 84–87.

²¹³ Quoted in Kracauer 1947, p. 142.

²¹⁴ Cowan 2008, pp. 147–58. As Michael Cowan argues, however, the film also drew heavily on Germanic traditions for its construction of the bodily ideal, a dimension that is often missed by critics (see Cowan 2005).

²¹⁵ On the censors' consideration of this and other similar films, see Keitz 2005b, pp. 293–96. On the nudist movement's frequent clashes with those who saw their publications as further examples of the trash and filth that censorship provisions were meant to deal with, see Ross 2005, pp. 35–65.

²¹⁶ 'Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit [1924]', in Kracauer 2004, 6.1, p. 144.

promoting their practices. Their magazines sought 'a transformed public visibility of the naked body', with that body acting as 'a sign of the modern'.²¹⁷ As Michael Cowan argues, the Body Culture movement 'saw their mission as that of reining in the overwhelming presence of a body in excess, one whose nervous tics, twitches, spasms, pains, cramps, convulsions, and paralyses refused to obey the dictates of the will and that thus played out the tragedy of a runaway objective culture in its assault on the autonomy of the human subject'.²¹⁸

This typical neurasthenic individual reappears throughout *Ways to Strength and Beauty*. The film is especially concerned with the impact of modern forms of labour on the body. We see clerks hunched over desks and seamstresses over sewing machines, their spines increasingly bent out of alignment. Bureaucratic rather than industrial labour is configured as the primary source of bodily degeneration. Given his own later interests in the new white-collar workers, it is perhaps not surprising that Kracauer found the film compelling upon initial viewing.

The film enacts a therapeutic practice through its depiction of the efforts of various body culture practices structured around the classical ideal of a healthy mind in a healthy body. Significantly, the film calls not for a transformation of work, but rather for hygienic practices to be learned in childhood, before the start of a working life, or in leisure time through the Body Culture movement. The film thus individualises the problems and their solutions, but also reinforces the dichotomous structure of capitalist time, the radical separation that masks the interdependence of work and leisure. At the heart of this approach is the problem of rhythm. If the rhythms of the workday produce tics, spasms, and curved spines, the rhythms of leisure must be remade to compensate. Nature provides us with the model in this respect. Throughout the film rhythmic bodies are juxtaposed with images of the rhythms of nature – ocean waves, trees blown by the wind, the undulations of crop fields. 'Movement', an intertitle suggests, 'becomes beautiful through its rhythm. That is a law of nature'.

Beauty here is again synonymous with health. An intertitle states that '[a] sense of rhythm slumbers in all of us; it only needs to be awoken'. This is the pedagogical task of the film, one that takes up from the rhythmic qualities of the film medium itself, a quality identified, as noted earlier, by Ruttmann and others. In its search for therapeutic mechanisms, *Ways to Strength and Beauty* drew on a range of dance and rhythm movements that were part of the

217 Möhring 2005, p. 201.

218 Cowan 2008, p. 113.

broader Body Culture tradition in Germany.²¹⁹ The film depicts the influential approach to bodily rhythm pioneered in Hellerau by Emile Jaques-Dalcroze that looked to music as a source for the regeneration of bodily rhythms. These conceptions of the regenerative power of rhythm went far beyond the film, and were much contested. The dance educator Alice Bloch shared the perspective of the film in contrasting the natural rhythms of the body with the artificial rhythms of the machine,²²⁰ a dichotomy that structured the critiques of the Tiller Girls we saw earlier as well. Others, however, offered an incipiently political reading of dance. These included Dalcroze's students Rudolf Laban and Mary Wigman, Munich-based dance activists and educators who broke from him, arguing that rhythm was an irrational internal bodily phenomenon.²²¹ They were influenced in part by Ludwig Klages, but also drew on Expressionist notions of the body as the locus of social transformation; they 'wanted to actively revolutionise bourgeois society through rhythm.'²²² *Ways to Strength and Beauty* took a strong stance on the therapeutic value of rhythmic motion, but this therapy was directed at the hygienic goals of bourgeois society rather than its transformation.

The horizon for the film's conception of dance and bodily movement was the nation. An intertitle proclaimed that '[d]ance is an elemental instinct of humanity. Each nation nevertheless has its own characteristics'. In a review of a new, re-released version of the film in 1926, Kracauer picked up on this nationalist naturalisation of the body. By this point he was much more critical of the film than he had been in his initial assessment, denouncing the 'abstract-mythological'²²³ tendencies of the Body Culture movement and arguing that

219 Toepfer 1997 argues that while many aspects of the Body Culture and Life Reform movements were international in scope, nudism and rhythm were particular to the German context (pp. 7–8). The idea that the rhythmic nature of film expressed a more primordial impulse could also be linked to nationalist and republican ideas. Erwin Redslob, head of the *Reichskunstwart*, the government department whose mandate was to produce a popular cultural foundation for the Republic, argued that '[t]he fascination of film is much older than the film itself. It lives in the wish for rhythmic and festive movements and intensive moments, just as people experience them at cultic festivities or sports competitions' (quoted in Rossol 2010, p. 63).

220 Bloch 1989.

221 Günther 1990, pp. 20–31

222 Günther 1990, p. 29.

223 'Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit [1926]', in Kracauer 2004, 6.1, p. 254 (this article should not be confused with that of the same title cited earlier).

the film's 'establishment of the body as the sole ground for everything higher gives rise to confusion. The spirit does not grow like a plant out of the body'.²²⁴

Challenges to these dominant tendencies in the Life Reform movement came from within as well, however. The proletarian nudist movement around Alfred Koch was most notable in this respect, shifting calls for regeneration away from the nation and towards a socialist critique of capitalism. Koch proclaimed the regenerative power of body culture in uniting body and soul, but, as he argued in 1924, it was capitalist society that produced bodily degeneration:

The existence of people must be ensured. Pests upon humanity are, among others, the stock-market speculators, the exploiters of labour, the representatives of alcohol-capital, reactionary schooling. The strongest battle against these parasites and beasts.²²⁵

Given the dank and dark conditions of the tenements in which so many workers lived and the physically demanding nature of proletarian life and labour, it is not surprising that Koch's call found a ready response. Indeed, as Nick Hopwood argues, nudism had as much of a base on the socialist left as on the right, and was promoted in places such as the proletarian popular-science magazine *Urania* that reached a circulation of over 25,000.²²⁶

Whether in *Urania* or in the vast number of similar publications that spanned the political spectrum, understandings of the healthy body were mediated by visual technologies, especially photography and film. We can see this tendency reflected in *Ways to Strength and Beauty*. Life Reform movements may have stressed a return to nature, but it was film technology itself that facilitated the return to the classical body. The significance of technological mediation was thematised explicitly in the film, a perspective that echoed in some respects the avant-garde ideas of the new medium discussed earlier in the chapter. The enthusiasm of Moholy-Nagy and others for electric light (he called

²²⁴ 'Wege zu Kraft und Schönheit [1926]', in Kracauer 2004, 6.1, p. 255.

²²⁵ Koch 1989, p. 99. See also Georgieff 2005.

²²⁶ Hopwood 1996, pp. 137–38. In spite of their social critique, however, the language of the left frequently echoed their bourgeois counterparts. For example, Theodor Hartwig, the chair of the Proletarian Freethinkers' International, described the value of *Freikörperkultur* thus: 'The upright body is the vessel of an upright mind, taut muscles the symbol of unshakeable conviction. If the workers' sport associations have prepared the way, the proletarian freethinkers have an easy task, directing the will to repression into healthy paths, clearing out unhealthy habits and sweeping the debris of past centuries from the worker's mind' (quoted on p. 137). See also Walter and Regin 1991, pp. 35–38.

it an 'absolute medium'),²²⁷ x-rays, or slow-motion film was shared by many in the Body Culture movement, despite their emphasis on the power of sunlight for health. New forms of vision and light could enable bodily regeneration not only through the mechanisms of film and photography, but also in other ways. Thus, sequences in the film demonstrating the curvature of the spine made extensive use of x-ray images. More important was the use of another of the new techniques of vision highlighted by Moholy-Nagy, Richter, Benjamin, and others, namely, slow-motion. In the section on dance, the movements of the Russian performer Tamara Karsavina are slowed in order to demonstrate the significance of rhythm. The technique itself is highlighted in an intertitle: '[o]nly the slow-motion camera can demonstrate the full beauty and power of Karsavina's art'.

For all the emphasis on natural rhythms, then, the film in fact drew on what we might call a hidden Taylorism of the nude or dancing body. These new media technologies produced a scientising aesthetic and a hygienic impulse that shared a strong commonality with practices of industrial discipline. The use of juxtaposition noted by Kracauer, the x-rays and slow motion, and the rhythms of *Ways to Strength and Beauty* all combine to produce a vision of bodily transformation that points simultaneously back to the Greeks and forward to a reconstituted Taylorised *Volkskörper*. As Maren Möhring argues, the tanned natural body of the Body Culture movements was increasingly technologically mediated, expressing affinities in this respect with the metallic machinic body of the radical right body we saw in the second chapter.²²⁸ This militarised conception of the individual and national body was captured by a Professor Huntemüller in an article on the Body Culture movement published in the aftermath of the War in the popular science magazine *Kosmos*. 'Just as a healthy body seeks to protect itself against an illness, so can we also see here in the German fatherland that our healthy national body [*Volkskörper*] finds the right defense mechanisms against the dangerous front threatening it'. The Body Culture movement 'carries the hope within it, that our national body [*Volkskörper*] can with luck get through this serious crisis'.²²⁹

227 Hoormann 2003, pp. 60–74.

228 Möhring 2005, pp. 209–11. Möhring describes how this body work was frequently configured as a form of sculpting (pp. 203–5), a perspective that highlights the aesthetic investments of the movement. This metaphor also recalls the scene in Toller's *Transformation* where Friedrich vainly attempts to sculpt the national body.

229 Huntemüller 1921, p. 114. Huntemüller also looked back to the Greeks, arguing that their example was especially important in difficult times; in the Renaissance and during the

The sense of crisis felt so powerfully in the aftermath of the War never fully abated, although during the years of relative economic stabilisation in the middle of the Weimar period it took on less apocalyptic tones. *Ways to Strength and Beauty* is in a sense emblematic of this middle period, directed at that archetypal film audience we saw in previous sections, the feminised new white-collar workers, whose curved spines and neurasthenic tendencies threatened national recovery. It produced this effect through the appropriation of a classical aesthetics in the service of what can only be described as bourgeois kitsch. In this respect, the film was part of a broad range of cultural projects in the period that sought to combine social hygienic education with entertainment. Most notable among these were the hygiene exhibitions that drew millions of viewers, and that offered a controlled context for the propagation of bourgeois ideals to bourgeois and working-class audiences.

Prior to the War, exhibitions like the 1911 International Hygiene Exhibition in Dresden had promoted the values of social hygiene and, to an extent, eugenics. A hygiene museum was one of the legacies of that exhibition, and the staff of the museum was instrumental in the organisation of subsequent events during the 1920s.²³⁰ The largest of these was the *Gesolei* held in 1926 in Düsseldorf, a massive undertaking whose buildings covered 400,000 square metres and which attracted as many as eight million visitors. *Gesolei* brought together a vast array of material under a broad social hygiene rubric seeking, as the scientific general secretary of the exhibition Marta Fraenkel put it, to enable 'German people to return to health'.²³¹ This return could be read as a call for a general regeneration in the face of the degenerative impact of modern life, but it was also more specific. Eight years on, the War and its aftermath continued to be at the forefront of questions of national health and hygiene. As Gustav Reuter, organiser of the social welfare section and Düsseldorf's councillor for welfare, put it, the questions framing *Gesolei* were: '[h]ow can the modern person, emerging out of the horrors of the War and post-War experiences, become healthy and remain healthy? How can he meet the great challenges of the near future with a robust and heightened intensity? ... What must the state,

French Revolution the Greeks likewise served as a key touchstone in responses to social upheaval.

230 Vogel 1927.

231 Fraenkel 1927, p. 397. This article, as well as a number of others on which I draw below, comes from a massive, lavishly illustrated catalogue of the exhibition. The organisers of the exhibition as well as each of its constituent sections contributed articles, giving an overview not only of the contents of the exhibition, but also of the thinking that informed it.

society, and the individual do in order together to heal the great wounds of the war?'²³² Reuter invoked familiar concerns of social and racial hygiene, especially around the declining birth rate and the surplus of women. The primary fault, though, lies with Germany's enemies – the 'hunger blockade' of Germany during the War, the reparations demanded by the Treaty of Versailles, and the occupation of the Ruhr were the immediate causes of Germany's troubles.²³³

The name of the exhibition came from its three major divisions: *GESundheitspflege* (health care), *SOziale Fürsorge* (social welfare), and *LEibesübungen* (physical exercise). Each major division was further subdivided into a host of smaller areas ranging from the natural and physical sciences to examinations of housing and other social conditions. At the heart of the exhibition was 'the Human' (*der Mensch*).²³⁴ In a famous graphic, this human was depicted as a 'palace of industry' (*Industriepalast*), an organism whose metabolic processes were rendered as machinic. As was so often the case in discourses of social hygiene, the human was simultaneously universalised and particularised. Thus, particular populations had their own sub-sections in the exhibition, most notably workers, women, and Jews. Colonial hygiene also had its own section. These different sections were united through the German *Volkskörper*, the structure of the exhibition mapping the individual and national body as normative space around which clustered various non-normative modes of embodiment and the social hygienic technologies and practices through which they could be reintegrated.

The *Gesolei* exhibition echoed many of the themes that I have taken up here and in earlier chapters. At the centre of its social hygienic concern was the regulation and disciplining of labour and the containment of the working-class movement. For Arthur Schloßmann, one of the exhibition's organisers, this meant that society had a 'duty to take into consideration . . . that no man becomes incapable of work whose capacity for work can still be used.'²³⁵ George Price, a visiting health professional from New York, recorded the organisers' introduction to the exhibition that likewise highlighted the positive importance of labour, tied in this case to the control of working-class radicalism:

²³² Reuter 1927, pp. 636–37.

²³³ Reuter 1927, pp. 636–44.

²³⁴ Fraenkel 1927, pp. 397–98, placed this generic figure at the centre of the exhibition's organisation, represented graphically in the book by a flow-chart with 'der Mensch' at the top.

²³⁵ Quoted in Lieberman 1998, p. 10.

The basis of all social welfare is the health of the people. Upon health depends the productivity and the efficiency of the individual, of the people and of the whole nation. The working class and its working power is Germany's future *capital*. Only the healthy can work for Germany's future. The most mighty weapon in the fight against constitutional and other revolutions is the education of the people. Hence, the Düsseldorf 'Gesolei' Exhibition, with its central idea of the highest aim of social welfare, based upon the education of the masses of the people and all classes of the nation.²³⁶

Work capacity remained highly gendered, however, with women's workplace participation always, as we have seen, a fraught issue. By the time of the 1930 Hygiene Exhibition in Dresden, held after the Depression had taken hold, the message had become even clearer. Mounted in collaboration with the BdF, the umbrella organisation of bourgeois-women's groups, the premise of the section of the exhibition was that women bore a significantly higher 'biological burden' than men, and should therefore limit their waged labour.²³⁷

The section of the exhibition on '[l]abour- and trades'-hygiene, accident prevention' gives a good sense of the dominant approach to labour in the *Gesolei*. Health and safety was understood solely as a technocratic problem for which technology and hygienic propaganda were the primary responses. The section featured various industries, many of which promoted the values of new approaches like psychotechnics, work psychology, and preventative advertising that applied a Taylorist risk management approach to the regulation of labour.²³⁸ This was also evident in the section on physical exercise. Rather than the more nebulous values of nudism promoted by *Ways to Strength and Beauty*, the section promoted rationalised practices of exercise and gymnastics as the hygienic response to bodily degeneration.²³⁹ Social welfare was an important dimension of workers' health and safety, but this was understood in the risk management terms of the insurance industry rather than on the basis of a

²³⁶ Quoted in Price 1926, p. 1203.

²³⁷ Fraenkel 1931, pp. 246–48.

²³⁸ Heinson 1927.

²³⁹ For a description of the division, see Wilms-Posen 1927. As with *Ways to Strength and Beauty*, the examples of classical Sparta and Athens as well as the Germanic middle ages play significant roles, as well as a room on the body culture of a hodge-podge of 'primitive' peoples (pp. 968–69). Dioramas of athletes hurdling, jumping, or diving took the place of slow-motion film in the rationalised presentation of bodily motion (pp. 971–72).

sense of work as exploitative or inequitable. As Reuter put it, in relation to the national economy social welfare 'is thus here the assistant of rationalisation'.²⁴⁰

The exhibition was by no means uncontroversial, however. The Düsseldorf municipal government provided substantial funding, with centre- and right-parties arguing that it could provide a substantial economic boost to the city, and serve as a spur to housing development.²⁴¹ The *Wirtschaftsbund*, a party with close ties to the 'House and Property Owners' Association, argued from a fiscal conservative position against the use of public funds for the exhibition,²⁴² but it was the KPD that provided the most sustained opposition. Housing was the key issue; the *Gesolei* tended to apply similar rationalising approaches to the problem of housing as it did in other areas, but this, the party argued, ignored the class basis of inadequate housing. Thus, a review in the KPD-oriented paper the *Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung* (*AIZ*) contended that the exhibition diverted scarce state funds desperately needed for housing. Even worse, those funds went to support an exhibition in which the very labour and social practices that produced class inequities were promoted and advertised along with industrial products and major companies.²⁴³

It was as an advertising and propaganda complex that the exhibition came closest to the ideals of the *Lehr-* and *Kulturfilm* movement. Highly rationalised, the exhibition sought to combine entertainment and education through the use of new forms of visual communication. Film itself played a minor role. Aside from the technical difficulties of showing films in such a context, Marta Fraenkel argued that 'the psychology of a visitor to an exhibition is that of a wanderer, not a theatre visitor'.²⁴⁴ Instead, it was the architectural design and organisation of the exhibition that provided the sense of movement shaping the technocratic pedagogies of the event. *Gesolei's* audiences were configured in much the same way as film audiences, however, with their primitive nature highlighted in the rather pointed comments of an American visitor: '[p]recisely the merit of the *Gesolei* is that it is designed to instruct the people

240 Reuter 1927, p. 667.

241 Lieberman 1998, pp. 66–68. Lieberman stresses that it was at the municipal level that many of the economic and social innovations of the period of stabilisation were located. On the architecture and design of the exhibition, see Wiener 2001.

242 Lieberman 1998, pp. 123–25.

243 *Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung* 1926, p. 6. Hans Freese's description of the housing section of the exhibition exemplifies the disconnect that the KPD found so galling. Freese was one of the key architects of *Gesolei*, and while he laments the lack of adequate housing in Düsseldorf, his celebration of the vast and beautiful spaces of the exhibition betrays no awareness that the two may be connected (Freese 1927, pp. 493–94).

244 Fraenkel 1927, p. 409.

by methods common to the picture-writing of savages, the tavern-sign, the placard, the poster and the movies'.²⁴⁵

The role of the avant-garde in this context is interesting. In rare instances their work appeared directly in the exhibition, most notably with the 'colour-light dome' put together by the avant-garde filmmaker Oskar Fischinger and the composer Alexander László that offered an immersive multi-sensory experience of 'colour-light-music' (*Farblichtmusik*).²⁴⁶ More generally, though, exhibitionary techniques were shaped by avant-garde innovations, driven by a shared sense of the primitive audience. *Gesolei* made heavy use of the new typographical and design strategies promoted by Moholy-Nagy and other modernist designers. Otto Neurath and the Museum of Society and Economy in Vienna, which had been founded the previous year, played an especially prominent role, collaborating closely not only with the organisers of *Gesolei*, but also later with the 1930 Hygiene Exhibition in Dresden. Neurath, a socialist who had participated in the 1918–19 revolutionary movements in Munich, developed exhibitions geared towards working-class enlightenment that drew on modern forms of display, advertising in particular, to further pedagogical goals.²⁴⁷ Instead of text, *Gesolei*'s exhibitions were thus built around graphic representations of its subjects that were designed to be grasped by the modern, distracted viewer. Neurath's intent, as was the case with Moholy-Nagy, went substantially beyond advertising; he saw in these new forms of visual culture the possibility for the progressive transformation of vision.

In some respects, these innovations enabled a progressive politics, a point noted in the *AIZ*'s review. The graphic representation of the precarious condition of the working class that appeared especially in the social welfare section, the review argued, played a positive role in fostering a critical and socially grounded approach to social hygiene.²⁴⁸ More generally, though, the critical potential was limited, as we can see in Walter Ruttmann's animated promotional film for *Gesolei* entitled *Der Aufstieg* ('The Climb' or 'The Rise'). The short begins with 1914 and the catastrophic damage the War wrought on national health. An animated cut-out figure is shown suffering from physical and implied psychological trauma, but is then regenerated by the combination of health care, social welfare, and physical therapy, paralleling the three divisions of the exhibition. Echoing the discourses of prosthetic will discussed

²⁴⁵ Garrison 1927, p. 5.

²⁴⁶ Keefer 2009. Their performances, which were built around Fischinger's 'absolute films', attracted over 40,000 visitors over the course of the exhibition.

²⁴⁷ Vossoughian 2008.

²⁴⁸ Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung 1926, p. 6.

in the last chapter, the man's return to health is demonstrated by his climbing stairs on what appears to be a prosthetic leg. Rather than the social critique sought by the *AIZ* reviewers, then, Ruttmann's short film endorsed the technocratic notions of hygiene that dominated the exhibition as a whole, suggesting in the process that the new forms of vision and embodiment promoted by artistic modernism were by no means incompatible with the repressive social hygiene of *Gesolei*.

If working-class hygiene was arguably the primary concern of the exhibition, this concern was structured through broader conceptions of racial hygiene grounded in a racialised understanding of the German *Volkskörper*. Two elements of *Gesolei* brought out this racial politics most explicitly, the Jewish section and the engagements with colonialism. The Jewish section was one of a few that stood outside the tripartite division of the exhibition, taking its place in the 'special group' alongside an affiliated art exhibition and two sections on Austrian developments. This liminal status mirrored the fraught nature of the German-Jewish identity, with the exhibition structure thus constituting Jewish hygiene as both inside and outside the concerns of the exhibition as a whole, and hence the German nation. The section itself was put together by the synagogues of Düsseldorf, and can be read as an attempt to 'manage' the liminal status of Jewish identity in the context of the exhibition, and in hygienic discourses more broadly. Indeed, in his description of the exhibit Rabbi Max Eschelbacher argued that the Jewish community faced hygienic challenges similar to German society, namely mixed-marriages and a declining birth rate. He also sought to undermine anti-Semitic claims to the contrary by stressing that Jews were relatively less likely to suffer from mental or nervous disorders, alcoholism, and other degenerative conditions, and that Jewish traditions around food and the body were profoundly hygienic in their implications.²⁴⁹ This response was profoundly ambivalent when read in the context of the separation of the section from the rest of the exhibition, most notably in that the organisers of the Jewish section sought to affirm an allegiance to the social and racial hygienic perspectives of the exhibition.

If Jews and Jewishness were located on the borders of German identity, constituting racial discourses as a category both inside and outside, German colonial history played a different role in delimiting national boundaries. Although it was nearly a decade since Germany had officially lost its colonial empire, nostalgia ran deep. Colonial references appeared at various locations in the exhibition, most directly in the section on colonial hygiene and tropical medicine that was part of the health care division. Friedrich Fülleborn, the Hamburg

249 Eschelbacher 1927.

doctor who was an organiser of the section, argued that German colonial rule was marked by its medical attention to the needs of settlers and colonised populations, and that these medical advances justified a restoration of German colonies. Arguing against the 'colonial guilt lie' that, as we saw in the previous chapter, held German colonialism to be especially brutal – Fülleborn referred to this in an article on *Gesolei* in *Der Kolonialdeutsche* as 'shameful lies'²⁵⁰ – he praised 'the health care that Germany had achieved in her colonies, and that in these areas there was no need to fear any strong critique'.²⁵¹ The section of the exhibition thus celebrated Germans like Robert Koch, whose work on the study of malaria and other diseases gained him a prominent role in colonial medicine. The overarching narrative, which was shared by the colonial movement as a whole, was of a colonial nostalgia stressing the German contribution to 'making healthy places in which "sensibly living" whites can live with hardly any more danger than at home'.²⁵²

Even the colonial hero Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck, whose exploits in East Africa during the War were a staple of Weimar colonial narratives, was inserted into the medical frame. As we saw in the second chapter, he and his soldiers had remained undefeated in the War, which in the exhibition was reread as partly a result of field medicine used by the troops. The room on Lettow-Vorbeck thus enabled medicine to be tied directly to militarist and imperialist constructions of the national body and national health. The Jewish section of the exhibition marshalled a parallel argument, with Eschelbacher contending that Jewish colonial projects in Palestine similarly promoted the regeneration of the Jewish people, as well as offering enormous hygienic benefits to the indigenous inhabitants.²⁵³

The colonial section in the *Gesolei* drew on an expanding tradition of colonial exhibitions put on by adherents of the colonial idea throughout the Weimar period. At the centre of these efforts were the groups we saw in the last chapter, the German Colonial Society (DKG) – with which Fülleborn was associated – and its umbrella organisation, KORAG, the most prominent among them. Exhibitions had been a staple of colonial propaganda during the colonial period proper,²⁵⁴ but they took on new urgency with the loss of colonies. 'Colonial Weeks' were celebrated annually, supplemented by a string of large

250 Fülleborn 1926, p. 221.

251 Fülleborn 1927, p. 582.

252 Fülleborn 1927, p. 598.

253 Eschelbacher 1927, p. 1002.

254 See Kirschnick 2002 for a discussion of two of the largest exhibitions, in 1904 and 1911, the first designed to rally support from the war against the Herero, the second in part to raise

and small exhibitions held regularly across the country. Running through all of these exhibitions was the sentiment expressed in the slogan around which the 1925 Colonial Exhibition in Berlin was organised: 'Germany needs colonies!' There was a powerful nostalgia underlying this need, but nostalgia oriented to a future restitution of colonialism bound up with national and racial health. 'The colonial question', argued the Foreign Minister Gustav Stresemann in his introductory statement endorsing the 1925 exhibition, 'is of great importance for us, a people squeezed into a small territory and without the means to obtain the necessary raw materials for its sustenance and industry'.²⁵⁵

The year 1924 was an especially significant one. It marked the 40th anniversary of Bismarck's telegram declaring the territory claimed by the trader Adolf Lüderitz to be under German protection, thus initiating the era of direct colonial rule. As one colonial paper put it rather hyperbolically, '[a] mighty wave of colonial excitement spread through Germany's regions on April 24, the occasion of the 40th anniversary of German colonial politics'.²⁵⁶ A major colonial congress was held, and the first post-War colonial monuments were erected. The fact that 1924 was the ten-year anniversary of the start of the First World War was also significant; colonial mobilisations were a part of broader nationalist reactions to the pacifist and left responses to the anniversary that I discussed in the previous chapter. The year 1925 saw the formation of an inter-party group in the Reichstag to promote colonial interests,²⁵⁷ and key political figures such as Stresemann found it important to at least pay lip service to the colonial ideal.

Berlin was by no means the only city to host colonial events. Colonial week celebrations took place around the country with further major exhibitions held in Munich in 1925 and Hamburg in 1926.²⁵⁸ Photography played a crucial role in these exhibitions, perhaps most notably in a 1928 exhibition in Stuttgart drawn from the collection of F.O. Koch, which included 30,000 photos he himself had taken along with a further 50,000 he had collected. As a commentary on Koch's photographs noted, they offered a powerful spur to the development

funds to support veterans of colonial wars. Kirschnick stresses the extent to which the exhibitions were experienced and configured as entertainment.

255 Quoted in *Kolonialkriegerdank* E.V. 1925, p. 18.

256 *Afrika Nachrichten* 1924, p. 101.

257 *Schnee* 1925.

258 *Der Kolonialdeutsche* 1925b; Rogowski 2003b, pp. 251–56. The Hamburg colonial week had as its backdrop the deliberations over potential German admittance to the League of Nations, which the pro-colonial forces hoped could lead to the return of colonial possessions.

of scientific and technical knowledge that painting or drawing could never match.²⁵⁹ The exhibitions were part of a broader pro-colonial visual culture that, by the later 1920s, had put down deep roots in the culture of the period. This was especially evident in the many publications put out by colonial societies that made extensive use of photography, in particular those like the *Illustrated Colonial Newspaper* or Köhler's *Kolonial-Kalender* geared towards a wider audience.²⁶⁰ The former was notable for its active solicitation of readers' photographs, a practice that, as we shall see in the next chapter, also played a prominent role in left-wing cultural practice in the later Weimar years.

The publications of the pro-colonial lobby fed into broader articulations of colonial nostalgia as well as a fascination with the 'exotic' that, despite their formal rejection of colonialism, extended to the left-wing press as well.²⁶¹ The popularity of colonial themes could be seen especially strongly in film, which combined ethnographic, scientific, and entertainment approaches in various configurations to produce a German colonial practice claimed, explicitly or implicitly, to have been wrongfully stolen. Colonial societies played a significant role in promoting and, in some cases, helping to produce such 'ethnographic cinema'. Thus, the German Colonial Film Society (DEUKO), supported by the government's Colonial Department and the DKG, released *Farmer Borchardt* in 1917, a settler's story taking place during the Herero uprising.²⁶² After the War, the *Übersee-Film* company was formed, headed by Hans Schomburgk and including the participation of a number of former colonial governors and other officials along with the DKG; the company was responsible for a number of productions, including those of Schomburgk himself.²⁶³

These explicitly pro-colonial films were generally less popular than the various commercial film genres that directly or indirectly evoked colonial narratives. Conrad Wiene's 1926 *Ich hatt' einen Kameraden* was an example of the

259 *Illustrierte Kolonial-Zeitung* 1928. An interesting point, though, is that many colonial novels and adventure stories in fact used drawings and paintings extensively, with the colonial artist Hans Aschenborn especially prolific in this respect. He also produced collections of drawings and paintings, and frequently contributed poetry and other writing to colonial and other publications. Painting arguably offered a more evocative complement to the purple prose of colonial literature.

260 Köhler put out other publications including a naval yearbook that addressed another of the sore points of the Treaty of Versailles: Germany's loss of naval power.

261 Stahr 2004.

262 Fuhrmann 2010, pp. 149–55. Already before the War, right-wing groups like the Pan-German League and the Navy League, along with the DKG, used film extensively to broaden their base of support (see Loiperdinger 1996, pp. 45–47).

263 Nagl 2009, pp. 232–38.

latter, and notable for its explicit thematisation of colonial war, as was Martin Rikli's *Heia Safari!* (1929), based on Lettow-Vorbeck's account of his wartime defence of German colonialism.²⁶⁴ Colonial film was a hybrid form, however, intersecting with other genres. As Assenka Oksiloff argues, '[w]hile early photographic practices borrow from colonial adventure rhetoric, later colonialist and ethnographic filming borrows from the urban detective tale'.²⁶⁵ The 'mountain films' produced by Arnold Fanck or Leni Reifenstahl that were popular especially in the later Weimar years provide another example of the interpenetration of genres; their invocation of motifs of individual and national regeneration through the conquest of nature was very similar to tropes of colonial nostalgia.²⁶⁶ Science fiction films and literature also provided a platform for reflections of identity and difference that drew on racial and colonial themes; *Metropolis*, with the intrepid Freder uncovering the dark and mysterious underground world of the workers, suggests links as well with the classed nature of these narratives.²⁶⁷ All of these films, as Christian Rogowski argues of colonial film, 'create an imaginary space, with exotic locales that promise fulfillment of fantasies of power and eroticism, fantasies that erase the stigma of world political humiliation. In a sense, then, early Weimar popular cinema constitutes a kind of surrogate colony that caters to the bruised national ego'.²⁶⁸

While these commercial films produced a broad cultural context for the reception of colonial ideas, those ideas were articulated most clearly in documentary film. Schomburgk was perhaps the most prolific and influential of the documentary filmmakers. After leaving Germany in 1898 at the age of 17, he spent years working in colonial administrations and exploring Africa. By 1914, as he recounted in a later memoir, he had begun to take a significant interest

264 Waz 2005, pp. 188–90. The campaign of Lettow-Vorbeck, the radical right hero who, as we have seen, became a symbol for the undefeated German army, in fact had its own room in the *Gesolei*. The subject was ostensibly the hygienic practices that enabled his success, but this was of course tied up directly with the health of the national body.

265 Oksiloff 2001, pp. 85–86.

266 Nenno 2003. Béla Balázs collaborated on one such film, Reifenstahl's 1932 *The Blue Light* (see Loewy 2003, p. 143).

267 On science fiction culture, see Fisher 1991; Hermand 1992. One explicit example of colonial themes in science fiction came in Alfred Reifenberg's 1925 novel *The Demise of the Moloch Monster*, which imagined the collapse of the Weimar Republic and the rise of a resurgent Germany. A strong dictator ends the indignity of Versailles, restores Germany's rightful colonies and, performing a reversal of the 'Black Horror on the Rhine', convicts the French of racial treason, and punishes them by banishing the French population in its entirety to Senegal for a period of fifteen years (see Fischer 1991, pp. 46–55).

268 Rogowski 2010, p. 228.

in filmmaking, but the War and its aftermath prevented him from travelling to 'my beloved Africa'.²⁶⁹ He lamented the fact that Germany had been 'expelled from and shut out of all colonial possessions'.²⁷⁰ His work in the Weimar period, while primarily adventure and ethnographic in orientation, has this nostalgia as a prominent sub-theme.

The economic problems of the immediate post-War years made filming in Africa difficult for German crews; the release of Schomburgk's film *People and Animals of the Jungle* and other colonial films around 1924, which did involve African footage, was thus celebrated in *Die Lehrfilm* as a sign of growing economic stability.²⁷¹ But it was not only economic problems that blocked German film expeditions; the Treaty of Versailles restricted German travel to former colonies.²⁷² Thus, a review of *People and Animals of the Jungle* in the colonial paper *African News* expressed the hope that '[permission] is granted to him [Schomburgk] one day to work there, where once the German spirit held sway over black heads. To once again see the German colonies, if only in film, is truly the greatest hope of all those who are no longer permitted to travel there'.²⁷³ Because of the ban Schomburgk was forced to film in self-governing Liberia, whose independence from other colonial nations led the German colonial movement to look to it as a potential surrogate colony.²⁷⁴ Nevertheless, a nostalgia for true colonial rule remained, as his later account of his journey stresses: 'we were happy and proud that we were the first German expedition since the war to have reached our goal, but still sad that we could only bring back images from foreign lands, and not from our German colonies'.²⁷⁵

Despite his regrets, film provided both a vehicle for colonial nostalgia and a surrogate for German rule, finding in Liberia a fruitful location for shooting. In Schomburgk's estimation, Monrovia, the capital of Liberia, was a 'film city' surpassing even Hollywood. This status was cemented by the 'innate' acting ability

269 Schomburgk 1930, p. 116.

270 Schomburgk 1930, p. 7.

271 Hildebrandt 1924, p. 31.

272 Ibid.

273 Sachers 1924, pp. 360. This and the next issue of the paper also included full-page ads for the film.

274 Schomburgk's attitude to Liberia mixed an astute awareness of its history (for example, he stressed that the US had enabled its formation so as to allow black workers to leave and lessen the competition with white workers) and racist condescension. 'If today I was tasked with making a film about Liberia', he wrote, 'I wouldn't know if I would script it as a grotesque or a drama' (p. 120). On the colonial movement's broader interest in Liberia as 'an African land of the future for German exports', see Schmidt-Lamberg 1928, p. 161.

275 Schomburgk 1930, p. 185.

that, as we saw earlier, he imputed to Africans.²⁷⁶ Even the incoming president of Liberia allegedly recognised the significance of German film, commenting of Schomburgk's filming of his investiture in early 1924: '[w]hat then is more valuable for Liberia, the warships of the English or French, or the film apparatus of the Germans, who can capture in images this day for all eternity?'²⁷⁷

Schomburgk's underlying interest, evident also in many forms of European colonial knowledge and cultural production, was in using film to penetrate the secrets of primitive Africa. This desire was clearly evident in his filming of the apparently secret rituals of Bundu women in Liberia. Schomburgk claimed these rituals were normally inaccessible to men, but he managed to gain access despite the presence of 'the whirring camera, that must appear to these children of nature as the devil's machine'.²⁷⁸ It is also evident in reverse in his account of bringing film back to these 'children of nature', a true primitive audience. Schomburgk describes showing his earlier film *The German Sudan*, shot partly in Liberia, to an audience in Monrovia during his return in 1923–24. The hall was jammed to overflowing, with an astonished audience for 'the first time seeing an African film, seeing something that they understood and that was near to them, and with the whole Negro temperament they all acted along with it'.²⁷⁹ Again the primitive audience responds mimetically to film. The structure of colonial visual culture is captured in these two moments, on the one hand penetration into the secret mysteries of the primitive, on the other cementing the idea of the primitive audience that, as we have seen, sustained the dominant logic of film and other visual media more broadly in the period.

Schomburgk's films were promoted extensively in the colonial press, demonstrating the tight networks linking colonial film, literature, and other cultural forms with the colonial movement. Colonial societies were intimately involved in the screening and production of educational films, frequently organising as well as publicising screenings and, through DEUKO and other projects, enabling colonial film production.²⁸⁰ Such films were also often a part of screenings organised by various actors in the *Kultur-* and *Lehrfilm* movement.

276 Schomburgk 1930, p. 124.

277 Schomburgk 1930, p. 126. In a later book, he also recounted the role of film in recording German achievements, specifically the construction of a radio station and tower completed just before the outbreak of war in Togo (and subsequently blown up by the German colonial administration to prevent its capture). This magnificent German technological achievement 'lives only in my films' (Schomburgk 1931, p. 368).

278 Schomburgk 1930, p. 140. See also Oksiloff 2001, pp. 86–87.

279 Schomburgk 1930, p. 246.

280 Fuhrmann 2002; Waz 2005.

As Kracauer notes in the case of the Association of Art and Youth in Frankfurt, colonial films often played a prominent role in public screenings. Indeed, the interconnecting themes evident in Schomburgk's work – depictions of 'nature', celebrations of science, ethnographic studies, adventure – worked nicely to fulfil the nationalist educational goals of the movement, and balanced this with the need to entertain. Documentary film thus played a prominent role in the filmic production of a 'surrogate colony'.

The practice of filming itself provided a key element of adventure in these documentary accounts, with Schomburgk constantly stressing the dangers of filming and photographing in hostile and mysterious lands in both his writings and his films.²⁸¹ One of Schomburgk's camera technicians on *People and Animals of the Jungle* stressed the extent to which harsh climate and the dangers of the journey impacted the nature of filming.²⁸² Thus, the act of recording itself became part of the colonial adventure narrative. This perspective was reinforced by the frequent pairing of the camera with the gun as key technologies of colonial rule, a development that predated the Weimar period. Schomburgk himself said that while he loved hunting, the camera provided the true adventure. After all, he mused, 'what is hunting with a rifle compared to hunting with a camera?'²⁸³ This symbiotic relationship was cemented in military practice, and not only in the colonial context. Oskar Messter, for example, the entrepreneur and film pioneer behind the *Messter-Woche* newsreels that were ubiquitous during the War, also invented a machine-gun camera used to train fighter pilots.²⁸⁴

If colonial adventure tales represented the entertaining side of educational film, the 1927 film *World History as Colonial History* took a different tack. Produced by the prominent *Lehrfilm* advocate and filmmaker Hans Cürlis and his Institute for Cultural Research, the film was reminiscent of the *Gesolei* and other exhibitions in its heavy use of graphic representations conveying the

281 Schomburgk 1930, pp. 237–48.

282 Hrich 1924.

283 Schomburgk 1930, p. 130. On the colonial links between the camera and the gun, see Landau 1999; Oksiloff 2001, pp. 79–80.

284 Messter writes in his *Mein Weg mit dem Film* that the camera machine-gun 'required exactly the same trigger movement and had the same sighting mechanism [as a regular machine-gun], but instead of a cartridge belt it had rolls of film. Instead of providing 600 rounds per minute it made 600 shots of film per minute. Each shot displayed the enemy plane and a crosshair. The pilot could see where he had aimed and whether he had "aimed" too high or too low, and could correct his next flight accordingly ... It became the rule that pilots were not sent into battle until they had proved themselves competent shots with the machine-gun camera' (quoted in Koerber 1996, p. 294n26).

overwhelming importance of the colonial question to German development. As Tobias Nagl argues, its tone was '[s]ober and cold, technocratic and abstract, [the film] avoiding any trace of humanistic clichés and seeking to give imperialist desires a modern foundation oriented towards "scientific" arguments'.²⁸⁵ Despite its tone, however, the film was popular, reaching around 2 million viewers in the year and a half after its release, although many were schoolchildren.²⁸⁶

World History as Colonial History was funded in part by the DKG, and was accompanied by a book outlining the film's themes. The book began with endorsements from a wide range of prominent colonial figures, including the former colonial governor Theodor Seitz, the former Colonial Secretary Bernhard Dernberg, and Hans Bell, the leader of the inter-party colonial grouping in the Reichstag. The film argued that the colonial question was deeply bound up with the post-War contestation of Germany's eastern and western borders, as well as domestic issues of unemployment, housing, and overpopulation.²⁸⁷ It echoed the economic arguments of the colonial movement in stressing that even during the colonial era the German empire was proportionately much smaller than the British or the French, and that the subsequent loss of even these limited possessions left the German people and economy without adequate space. 'For a modern state', the companion volume argued, 'colonial questions are questions of life and death'.²⁸⁸

This association of colonialism with demographic fears of a *Volkstod*, the idea of the death of the nation, is central to understanding the depth of Weimar colonial nostalgia. As I argued in the introduction to the book, discourses of racial hygiene relied on the idea of a *Volkstod* in stressing the existential dangers posed by racial degeneration. This fear also underlay the panic over the 'Black Horror on the Rhine' that we saw in the previous chapter, which pointed to racial mixing as the primary threat to the *Volkskörper*. In the *Kultur-* and *Lehrfilm* movement we can see the extent to which these conceptions of social and racial hygiene were profoundly shaped by a visual economy in which the somatic markers of race were but one expression of broader cultural concerns and anxieties over the health and degeneration of the *Volkskörper*. Film itself was configured both as a degenerative threat, and as a medium for the production of health. It was in this latter vein that a film like *World History as Colonial History* operated. But, as we saw already with Schomburgk's films, this understanding of the therapeutic potential of documentary film was built as well

285 Nagl 2009, p. 342.

286 Waz 2005, p. 191.

287 Institut für Kulturforschung 1926, p. 40.

288 Institut für Kulturforschung 1926, p. 7.

on an explicit thematisation of race understood in terms of bodily markers of difference. In constituting race as somatic, new media thus also played a crucial role. In the final section, then, I turn to the role of these new media, photography in particular, in producing scientific conceptions of racialised bodies.

5.5 Racial Aesthetics: Photography, Film, and the Weimar Body

In *From Caligari to Hitler*, Siegfried Kracauer argued that '[i]n the course of their spatial conquests, films of fiction and films of fact alike capture innumerable components of the world they mirror'. Film looks outward, uncovering the grand sweep of the world, but it also looks inward: '[f]ilms seem to fulfill an innate mission in ferreting out minutiae'.²⁸⁹ Kracauer's description of film's 'spatial conquests' is apt, especially when we consider films such as *World History as Colonial History* in which the camera's imperial gaze worked to counteract geopolitical fears of a loss of German 'living space' (*Lebensraum*) and its subsequent degenerative effects.²⁹⁰ That imperial exploration, however, was matched by a fascination with uncovering the hidden dimensions of everyday life in Germany, in particular urban life. This gaze was evident in the various city films that I have discussed. The camera roved the urban landscape seeking out the dark corners of the city and its marginalised figures, opening them up to a hygienic scrutiny. As Benjamin notes, early photography pioneered this type of spatial conquest. In 'Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century', he cites Nadar's early photographs as an important development: 'for the first time, the lens was deemed capable of making discoveries'.²⁹¹ Those discoveries included the Paris sewer system, one of the earliest examples of systems of modern urban hygiene, and a symbol of the dark underground of the modern city. Indeed, this penetrating vision was precisely that which was celebrated by so many of the theorists discussed at the beginning of the chapter.

The logic of spatial conquest evident here finds its social form in the idea of the *Volkskörper*, which likewise configures the body as simultaneously national/racial and as individual, the hygienic gaze bringing these two different scalar levels together. This spatial logic was nowhere more evident than in discourses of race, which brought the landscape of the individual body together with that of the nation. As I argued at the end of the last chapter, these racialised concerns were deeply rooted in a colonial logic in which

289 Kracauer 1947, p. 7.

290 Murphy 1997. On the colonial dimensions of this geopolitical thought, see pp. 191–214.

291 'Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century', in Benjamin 1978, p. 150.

questions of demographics and population politics played important roles. Thus, the colonial film and the city film appear as complementary, each concerned with a different facet of the health of the *Volkskörper*. From the perspective of social hygiene and eugenics, this health was increasingly conceptualised in racial terms, with the body explicitly configured as white. Film and especially photography, I will argue in this concluding section, played crucial roles in shaping racial practices: mediating the relationship between colony and metropole, the individual and national body, and the popular and scientific, these visual practices enabled the development of coherent and increasingly effective ideas of racial hygiene.

The spatial dimensions of the racial politics of the Weimar period were most evident in the widespread interest in the themes covered in *World History as Colonial History*. The colonial movement, as we have seen, constantly stressed the significance of spatial expansion for the regeneration of the German *Volkskörper*. This desire for expansion took on various forms. For the German central banker Hjalmar Schacht, for example, the issue was economic. In a prominent speech to a meeting of the DKG in 1926 he argued that such issues transcended political differences, and that Germany's economic well-being depended on access to food and raw materials that only a colonial empire could bring.²⁹² While for him this meant the promotion of chartered companies rather than direct colonial rule, many in the colonial movement rejected this purely economic argument because it downplayed the importance of colonies for emigration, a key argument of demographic activists.

For many in the colonial movement, this settler colonial project was fundamental to the preservation of a German and European racial essence. Rudolf Böhmer, writing in the *Illustrated Colonial Newspaper*, argued that this was a spatial issue. 'The struggle for existence is a struggle over space... The right of every people [*Volkes*] to space is thus grounded in the most basic, natural principles of life that all organic living things have in common.'²⁹³ The aesthetically and politically objectionable poem 'Blue Flowers' by E.F. Katiti published in 1931 in the popular yearly *Köhler's Kolonial-Kalender* concretised these purportedly universal tendencies, drawing out the racial and national dimensions of this colonial impulse. Here a dying German soldier, fighting to save the colonies during the First World War, bleeds into the African soil. Blue flowers, matching the blue of his eyes, miraculously grow there, laying claim to a racialised German Africa rooted in nature.²⁹⁴

292 Schacht 1926.

293 Böhmer 1928, p. 218.

294 Katiti 1931.

This settler impulse is familiar from the discussions in the previous chapter, and ran through all of the colonial literature of the period. Hans Grimm's massive colonial novel *A People without Space* (*Volk ohne Raum*), whose title echoed a phrase that had already been used by the Foreign Minister Gustav Stresemann in a speech at the 1925 Berlin Colonial Week and Exhibition, gave this impulse its most popular voice.²⁹⁵ As has been the case with most settler colonial projects, Germany's lack of space was paired with a claim of colonial emptiness. Thus, Kurt Faber could describe Southwest Africa as a 'space without a people'.²⁹⁶ Visual representations were crucial in sustaining these twinned conceptions of space. Thus, on the one hand we have the colonial films and photography that represent colonial lands as accessible for exploration, while on the other city films of the period were frequently marked by a claustrophobic atmosphere, generating an almost physical sense of life, especially degenerate life, pressing in on the viewer. As we have seen, in focusing on prostitution and other loci of degeneration these films were reproducing powerful narratives of racial hygiene rooted in demographic concerns.

In earlier discussions I have touched on the extent to which concerns with grotesque bodies were shaped by a sense of uncontrolled proliferation and spilling over boundaries. In Jünger's desire for hard metallic contours or in Dix's images of fleshy and overwhelming female bodies, we can see the extent to which bodily delimitation and coherence underlay ideas of degeneration. In colonial ideologies, these fears and desires were mapped onto the globe, presenting Germany as a dangerously overflowing body. Colonialism represented a therapeutic mechanism, a hygienic practice that could alleviate the border problem. At the same time, however, this process produced a twinned body of another kind, the racialised body. As we saw with the fears of miscegenation so evident with the panic over the 'Black Horror on the Rhine', the bounded body was at once a purified body. The production of the *Volkskörper* as a racially pure or stable body was thus expressive of the contradictory impulses of imperialist and colonialist practices as well as ideals of demographic purity. These broader tensions were crystallised in the individual racialised body.

Over the course of the Weimar period, conceptions of the *Volkskörper* were shaped ever more strongly by the field of racial science which was dominated

295 Grimm 1927. Friedrich Burgdörfer's 1932 book *A People Without Youth* (*Volk ohne Jugend*) shows how this panic over space was translated into the language of demography, with its fears of a *Volkstod*. Burgdörfer was an influential populariser of statistics that purported to show the impending decline of the German *Volk* (see Reinecke 2005; Bryant 2007).

296 Faber 1930, p. 24.

by radical right-wing ideologies. Proponents saw racial hygiene in existential terms, and race itself as biologically rooted and determined. Photography was crucial to this process. As Allan Sekula has argued, in the late nineteenth century photography played a central role in rendering bodies visible for and accessible to regimes of power through the creation of a dispersed archive. 'Photography came to establish and delimit the terrain of the *other*, to define both the *generalized look* – the typology – and the *contingent instance* of deviance and social pathology'.²⁹⁷ Images produce 'a generalized, inclusive *archive*, a *shadow archive* that encompasses an entire social terrain while positioning individuals within that terrain'.²⁹⁸ Kracauer developed a similar argument in 1927 for the social function of photography, arguing that '[t]he totality of all photographs must be understood as the *general inventory* of a nature that cannot be further reduced', a spatial disenchantment that he twinned with historicism's temporal logic. 'The barren self-presentation of spatial and temporal elements belongs to a social order which regulates itself according to economic laws of nature'.²⁹⁹ This photographic practice is thus an expression of an alienated capitalist order. 'The photographic archive assembles in effigy the last elements of a nature alienated from meaning'.³⁰⁰

Kracauer's photographic archive is bound up with his conception of the mass ornament which, as I have argued, represents a critical engagement with the *Volkskörper*. He does not develop an analysis of its racial dimensions, but this connection is emphasised by Sekula, who argues that a deep link between criminological uses of photography and the production of race emerged in the photographic archive.³⁰¹ One is immediately struck in this respect by the prominent role photography plays in Weimar racial science in mapping out racial typologies. Perhaps most notable in this respect is the work of Hans F.K. Günther, the most prominent racial theorist of the Weimar period, whose influence continued after the Nazi seizure of power. Günther's book *Racial Ethnology of the German People* (*Rassenkunde des deutschen Volkes*), first published in 1922 and in subsequent editions well into the Nazi period, propelled him to prominence. He also released a short popular version of the book in 1929, the *Small Racial Ethnology of the German People*, as well as a number of

297 Sekula 1986, p. 7.

298 Sekula 1986, p. 10.

299 'Photography' in Kracauer 1995, p. 61.

300 'Photography' in Kracauer 1995, p. 62.

301 Sekula 1986.

other works on the racial ethnology of the Jews in addition to tracts promoting the Nordic movement.³⁰²

The racial science developed by Günther drew heavily on the anti-humanist ethnological traditions that, as I discussed in the previous chapter, increasingly characterised German anthropology. These were based on physical anthropology approaches in which anthropometric measurements played a central role. Günther and others became increasingly concerned not only with distinguishing shared white-European racial characteristics, a perspective that had been developed by earlier racial hygienists such as Wilhelm Schallmayer, who died in 1919, but also in producing complex racial taxonomies and hierarchies of European populations.³⁰³ At the heart of Günther's concern was what he identified as the Nordic race. In *Racial Ethnology of the German People*, he catalogued five key races whose influence could be felt in Germany: the Nordic, the Mediterranean, the Dinaric, the Alpine, and the East Baltic. A race, for Günther, was characterised by 'its own unification of bodily features and mental characteristics', with each race 'always producing only people of the same kind'.³⁰⁴ While he acknowledged that environmental factors could have an impact on individuals, any environmental explanation for racial characteristics was ultimately unsatisfactory. Since at least Neolithic times, he argued, the 'racial image' (*Rassenbild*) of the European races has not changed; heredity, not environment determines the racial constant.³⁰⁵

In terms of methodology, Günther and other racial theorists used anthropometric systems of measurement, applied especially to the head and skull, to construct their typologies, with these systems of measurement increasingly to be tied to genetics (Ill. 24). The anthropologist Walter Scheidt was especially important in shifting the locus of race from morphological to genetic characteristics.³⁰⁶ He and others saw their approach as a corrective to the unsystematised collection of data undertaken by earlier researchers, arguing that anthropometric characteristics provided the visible text from which genetic meaning could be read, and that this required a systematic and

302 On Günther, see Hau 2003, pp. 150–60; Gray 2004, pp. 219–72; Lutzhöft 1971, pp. 28–47. As Gray notes, the *Kleine Rassenkunde* became required reading in schools in the Nazi period (pp. 223–24).

303 Weiss 1987 develops this argument of a gradual shift from Schallmayer's racial hygiene to that of the Weimar period. This also included a growing focus on negative eugenic interventions such as sterilisation.

304 Günther 1930a, p. 14.

305 Günther 1930a, pp. 246–52.

306 Evans 2010, pp. 200–7.

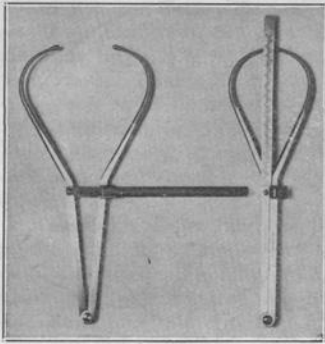


Abb. 5. Tasterzirkel,
geöffnet und geschlossen
($\frac{1}{10}$ wirklicher Größe). (Martin.)

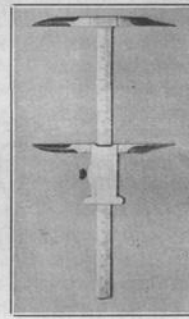


Abb. 6. Gleitzirkel
($\frac{1}{10}$ wirklicher Größe).
(Martin.)

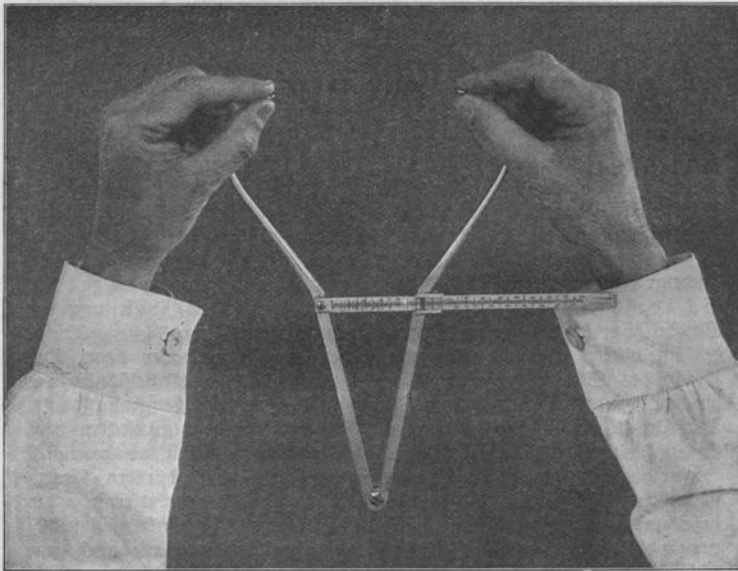


Abb. 7. Haltung des Tasterzirkels beim Messen (n. Martin, Lehrb. d. Anthropologie).

ILLUSTRATION 24 From Hans F.K. Günther (1922), p. 26. Anthropometric calipers used for measuring skulls and other body parts. Photography in this instance serves as a kind of second order guarantee of objectivity. The dream of scientific exactitude that underlay racial science is made visible to the reader here in the form of the calipers.

rationalised approach. Photography became central to this project, although Günther argued that in fact the interpretation of bodies predated modern technologies. The Assyrians, Babylonians, and Egyptians, he argued, had all been astute racial observers. 'In their pictorial works, they have often captured the racial essence of foreign peoples with surprising fidelity'.³⁰⁷ These ancient images are especially important as they validate the claim that the characteristics of Nordic, Jewish, and Black races are transhistorical. Reading the body was not straightforward, though. Environmental factors such as poor nourishment shaped appearances, which led Günther to distinguish the 'appearance-image' (*Erscheinungsbild*) from the 'heredity-image' (*Erbbild*). True racial science, he argued, could distinguish hereditary essence from environmental appearance.

Racial ethnology thus required a training of vision. Günther argued that his books served 'to sharpen the look, or better: to awaken more broadly a look, an understanding, an attention to, the racial determination of the human environment and history'.³⁰⁸ They provide this training through pages of photographs – primarily of faces but also of bodies – that aim to systematically produce a racial map of Europe and its margins. Skulls, hair, eyes, bodies, noses, ears, skin, even clothes, serve as markers of racial meaning (Ill. 25). Günther's photographs were supplemented by maps outlining the geographical reach of different races. The publisher, Lehmann Verlag, made the maps available to purchase or borrow for demonstrations in racial anthropology, and also reproduced them as wall posters for schools.³⁰⁹ Aesthetically, the images draw on traditions of portrait photography (many appear to be just that), but reinscribed in a scientific frame. This is done through repetition and rationalised presentation, the pages of carefully organised faces performing a scientific aesthetic that underpinned the claim to have uncovered racial essences. This scientific aesthetic was also linked to a classical aesthetic that, as we saw with the film *Ways to Strength and Beauty*, played a central role in mediating conceptions of the body. Throughout Günther's books, contemporary photographs are interspersed with images of classical paintings and sculptures, both ancient Greek and older German art, which together embody what the art historian Oskar Hagen in 1923 called a specifically 'German seeing'.³¹⁰

307 Günther 1930a, p. 16.

308 Günther 1930a, p. 7.

309 Gray 2004, pp. 256–57. Lehmann Verlag was the most prominent publisher of books in racial science.

310 This is the title of his book, *Deutsches Sehen* (Hagen 1923).

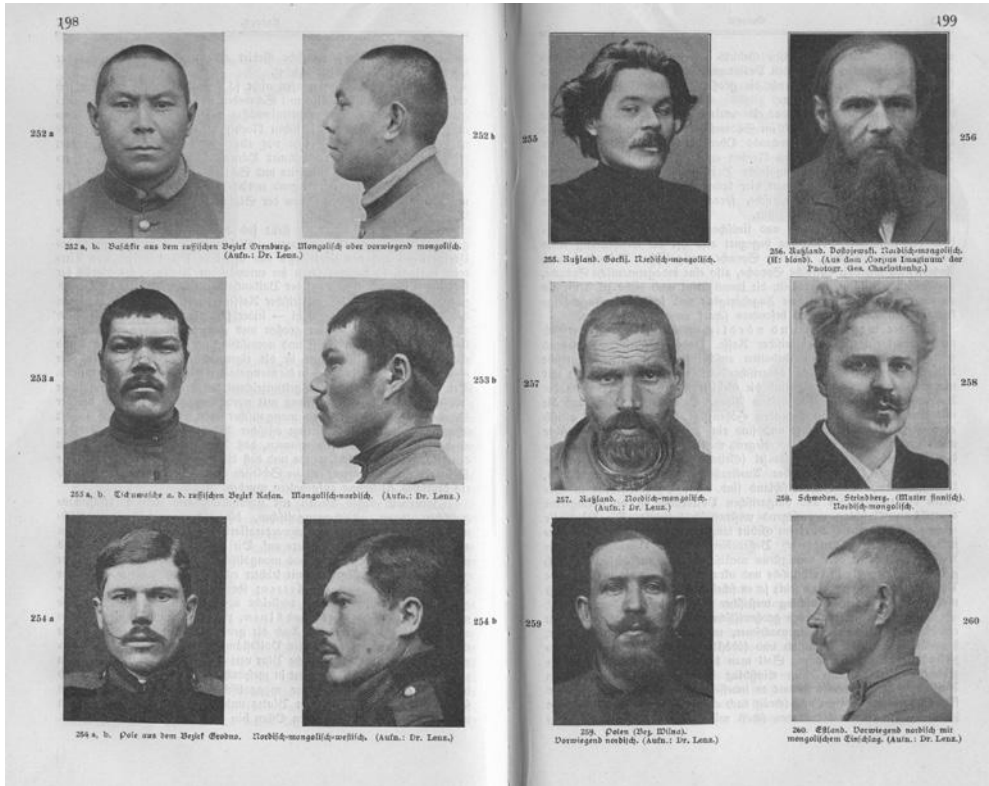


ILLUSTRATION 25 *From Hans F.K. Günther (1922), pp. 198–99.*

This is typical of the arrays of photographs of faces through which Günther constructs his racial typologies. Several of the faces are anonymous 'types' identified in terms of their geographical and racial characteristics, but among the photographs are also several of prominent writers, namely Maxim Gorky, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, and August Strindberg. As I have noted, writers and artists, in particular modernists, were frequently cited as bearers of degeneration, a perspective Günther follows here in reading them as exemplary racial types.

For some racial scientists this turn to art undermined the objectivity of the field. Thus, for Walter Scheidt the aestheticisation of racial science betrayed the demand for statistical consistency. Photography, he argued, must reflect the statistical ideal and not confuse beauty with statistical typicality.³¹¹ Rather than photographs, then, graphs, tables, and other such representations of racial typicality and deviance predominated in his book. As with Adolphe Quetelet, the nineteenth-century statistician who sought to construct the statistical 'average man' as a mechanism through which criminal 'deviance' could be discovered ('deviance' in this case marked by statistical deviation),³¹² Scheidt held that racial essences could be represented through statistical models of norms and deviations.

If Scheidt's fetishisation of the statistical average represented an extreme version of a mathematical approach to race, others challenged such perspectives as reductive. Ludwig Ferdinand Clauß, Günther's closest rival in the field of racial studies, was the most vocal proponent of a very different approach rooted in psychology. Clauß's *Race and Soul* (*Rasse und Seele*), published initially in 1926 and reworked in the early 1930s, drew on many of the same sources as Günther (Gobineau and Chamberlain, for example), but was oriented somewhat differently. Where Günther and Scheidt sought to read racial characteristics from the body, Clauß argued that the body merely reflected the racial soul. This was evident at the methodological level. Clauß rejected the focus on 'the blind belief in numbers and the sole validity of measurable and weighable values', arguing instead that to understand a person's or people's racial soul would mean 'to search it out in its own world, in which it lives, and to live with it there as far as possible'.³¹³ This participatory ethnography, which he sought to put into practice while travelling in the Middle East between 1927 and 1931,³¹⁴ involved a different conception of racial essence. Clauß placed a greater emphasis on the need to understand a race according to its own internal logic, an expressive unity he designated as the racial soul, and that contrasted with the construction of race as a compendium of somatic characteristics. This can be seen in his holistic discussion of the bodily form as 'the entire law-like correlation between the ways of movement of the soul and the layout of the bodily form (in short: between the form of the soul and its body); the style of the form [*den Stil der Gestalt*]'.³¹⁵

311 Scheidt 1927, pp. 60–63.

312 See Sekula 1986, pp. 19–24.

313 Clauß 1941, p. 21. This is the later, reworked, edition of the book.

314 Gray 2004, pp. 299–301.

315 Clauß 1941, p. 33.

Clauß's approach was not meant to challenge the racist conclusions reached by Günther, but rather sought to place an understanding of racial difference and hierarchies on a different footing. We can see this clearly in his racial aesthetics, which, in the first edition of *Race and Soul*, he framed through a theatrical metaphor. 'The body belongs to the soul as the stage [Schauplatz] to its mode of expression'.³¹⁶ In later editions, he stressed the importance of a photographic aesthetic in grasping racial essence. Instead of the rationalised catalogues produced by Günther, he deploys photographs illustratively and interpretively. Developing a racial vision required a different set of skills than the mathematical organisation underlying much racial science. 'We show photographs', he argued,

in order to make the living visible. However, that does not mean that our understanding is won through photographs. Photographs are representational media; apart from that: mnemonic devices, aids to memory, remarks on what is already known, notations, as it were. They are not a medium for knowledge [*Erkenntnis*, which also means recognition]. Knowledge is won through the living and predates the photograph. The photograph is a substitute for what it depicts, nothing more.³¹⁷

The photographic representation of the body, contra Günther, does not provide a text from which racial essence can be read, but a medium through which a pre-existing racial awareness can be fulfilled. Indeed, possession of such a racial awareness is itself, Clauß suggests, a sign of the superiority of the Nordic soul. The ability to distance oneself from one's own race and, through immersion, enter into the life of another, was a Nordic characteristic, a sign that the Nordic soul moved on a higher plane.

In Clauß's photographic aesthetic, then, photographs were not used to highlight anthropometric characteristics or create an archive of racial types. Rather, his photographs evoked movement and forms of expression that, he believed, were at the heart of the fundamentally different forms of life that each race embodied. Especially in the first edition of *Race and Soul* his photographic aesthetic drew on notions of bodily expression similar to those we saw in *Ways to Strength and Beauty*, although he had a much stronger sense that biological racial differences were the determining factor in shaping character. As with most understandings of the body in the period, for Clauß racial dichotomies were simultaneously and powerfully gendered, with photographs cementing

³¹⁶ Clauß 1926, p. 19.

³¹⁷ Clauß 1941, p. 22.



ILLUSTRATION 26 *Photographs from Clauß 1926, pp. 20–21, 24–25. Captions in the book identify the figures as follows: top left as 'Nordic girl'; top right as 'Bushman woman'; bottom left 'Archer (Hercules)'; bottom right 'African archers'. Clauß uses the Bushmen to mark out an absolute racial alterity, drawing on the common notion, which I discussed in the previous chapter, of the Bushmen as the ur-primitives. In the case of the Bushman woman, Clauß also draws on a common racist configuration of the black African female body, the caption in full reading 'Bushman woman (with the characteristic fat rump)'*

these intersecting forms of difference. Thus, in the first edition of *Race and Soul* we find feminine and masculine versions of racial difference displayed on facing pages (Ill. 26). Drawing on primitivist ideas, he configures African bodies as the polar opposite to the white European. Crucially, these are bodies in action (even if, in the case of the white woman, in a state of contemplative repose), their dynamic elements intended to evoke fundamentally different ways of life. In the case of masculinity, white European character is expressed through an ancient Greek statue of Hercules, the classical aesthetic tradition returning once more to ground racial identity, and to serve as the embodiment of the healthy *Volkskörper*.

In later editions of *Race and Soul* Clauß made even more explicit the extent to which photographs were not simply recording tools, arguing, for example, that an attention to lighting and staging of images used could play an important role in how the photographs generate their meaning.³¹⁸ Rather than types displayed in rationalised formations, photographs of everyday activities were more important in gaining access to racial character. Thus, a photograph of the owner of a small shipyard perusing technical documents demonstrates that we can see that for 'a man of this kind everything, even the casual, becomes an achievement [*Leistung*]'.³¹⁹ 'Achievement' is significant for Clauß, who, especially in later editions of *Race and Soul*, frequently describes the Nordic man as the *Leistungsmensch*, the term suggesting performance, achievement, work, and power; in capturing a small everyday moment, the photograph evokes a racial psychology and a racial essence. This is a different mode of racial seeing than the generation of types through the statistical or photographic agglomeration of specific instances; it is in the unique image and the unique moment that the racial essence can be grasped.

Clauß's approach here has strong affinities to the nostalgic use of photography that we saw earlier with Max Jungnickel's description of the man on the train. It was not only photography, though, and also not only the individual body that could evoke such nostalgic conceptions of the racialised body. Maps provided a representation of geographical space as racialised, both delimiting borders and graphically representing the potential points of dissolution or racial mixing that, as we saw in the previous chapter, were so central to the cultural logic of primitivism. This spatial character of race was evident more concretely in the frequent depictions of landscapes, homes, and folk art, cultural forms that even Scheidt acknowledged were important to understanding race.³²⁰ In Clauß's book German cathedrals feature prominently alongside

³¹⁸ Clauß 1941, pp. 34–35.

³¹⁹ Clauß 1941, p. 28.

³²⁰ Scheidt 1927, p. 60.

numerous paintings of German and European landscapes. Thus, in racial theory the German *Volkskörper* was consistently understood as embedded in naturalised landscapes and architectures expressive of the racial character; conversely, modern landscapes (cities themselves, but also the representations of cities by Expressionists and others) threatened the health of the racial body.

The importance of architecture was highlighted in a 1926 debate between the Bauhaus architect Walter Gropius and the racial theorist and art critic Paul Schultze-Naumburg in the pages of the popular magazine *Uhu*. Schultze-Naumburg argued that '[t]hose who have assimilated an image of our country and its buildings carefully and with their eyes open for its physiognomy will not have difficulty recognizing' that there are two forms of architecture in Germany: the older, which gives 'the impression of a collection of splendidly hewn busts of knotty peasants, manly artisans, delicate scholars, and gallant aristocrats', and the newer, 'a chaos of forms, more precisely formlessness, such as if we were to find ourselves at a market square filled only with the dregs of a people'.³²¹

Schultze-Naumburg's rejection of Gropius's functionalist modernism echoed Clauß's conception of the German racial soul. Schultze-Naumburg argued that it was a specifically German characteristic to give 'such great influence to alien forms that we are not only capable of penetrating deeply into other cultures but we become carried away by a desire to adopt the alien form itself'.³²² In architectural terms, this meant the displacement of the pointed roof which marked the true German architectural physiognomy with the flat roof. Preserving these national-racial forms of expression was central to the historical and environmental preservation movement, the *Heimatschutz*, of which he was a part.³²³

In Schultze-Naumburg's work we return to the concerns discussed in earlier chapters, namely the association of modernist and avant-garde art with degeneration. His 1928 book *Art and Race* represented the most influential integration of racial theory with aesthetics. As we saw in the last chapter, *Art and Race* attacked 'degenerate art' and the ideas of writers like Carl Einstein and Hans Prinzhorn. Maintaining a racialised aesthetic purity, Schultze-Naumburg argued, was a crucial dimension of a broader racial hygiene that was especially evident in the visual realm. 'When the race decays [*zerfällt*], racial feeling must naturally also fade away, and when racial feeling fades away the image of its

³²¹ Schultze-Naumburg 1994, p. 443.

³²² Schultze-Naumburg 1994, p. 445.

³²³ Sauerländer 2000, pp. 32–34.

destiny [*Zielbild*] that is rooted in every true race cannot be preserved'.³²⁴ This image could be found in art, but also in the landscape, a position that Clauß put forward even more strongly. 'From the achiever's path to experience there is a stylistic connection with the form of the nordic landscape, which is at the same time the stylistic background for all of the achievers' experiences'.³²⁵

This mutually sustaining relationship between the individual and their surroundings was characteristic of the idea of the *Volkskörper*, with its expressive relationship between the individual and the collective body. A contribution to a popular ethnological book on Germany took up this perspective, arguing that the German landscape was incredibly varied, but that it was unified through a German nature 'that is expressed in German industriousness, in successful German cultural production, German cleanliness and joy in beauty'.³²⁶ This hygienic cleanliness was rooted in the land, but was simultaneously transportable. The same piece argued that the Germanic impulse transcends German borders and 'also marks distant, foreign landscapes with its stamp'.³²⁷ This was precisely the idea animating the settler-colonial project, thus producing a geographically fixed conception of race that legitimised colonial expansionism. These seemingly contradictory tendencies were resolved by another contributor who drew on Günther's work to argue that *Volk* was an 'historical concept', while 'race, on the contrary, [was] purely one of natural science'.³²⁸ The landscape, or the soil, as it was increasingly called, provided the bridge between these two concepts, rendering them less and less distinguishable. Land could be reproduced, 'stamped', with a naturalised German racial essence.

The colonial moment marked the outward extension of these borders, but their internal instability was projected onto domestic threats to racial purity embodied most commonly by the figure of the Jew. Günther, who preferred to describe his approach in terms of 'Jewish enmity' (*Judengegnerschaft*) rather than anti-Semitism, devoted a book to the *Racial Ethnology of the Jewish People*.³²⁹ It was based on a methodology similar to the one deployed in his work on the German race, with photography used extensively to delineate Jewish racial characteristics. Günther insisted that Jewishness was a racial rather than a religious category,³³⁰ arguing that along with the Roma and Sinti (*Zigeuner*, or

324 Schultze-Naumburg 1928, p. 127.

325 Clauß 1941, p. 47.

326 Mahler 1929, p. 5.

327 Mahler 1929, p. 5.

328 Hoff 1929, p. 25.

329 Günther 1930b. On his discussion of 'Jewish enmity', see pp. 315–26.

330 Günther 1930b, pp. 280–84.

‘Gypsies’), Jews were not a European race.³³¹ Günther contended that, in fact, ‘[v]ery probably the Jews, or a vast majority of Jews, are more closely related to one another in their somatic-psychic hereditary factors than members of other peoples, especially the Western peoples; very probably specific somatic and above all specific psychic features are to be found more widely and are more strongly evident among the Jewish people than any other somatic and psychic features in other peoples’.³³² The implication is thus that not only are Jews different, they represent the most dangerous threat by virtue of their own racial unity. This racial unity corresponds directly to their disproportionate social power. Race here was given a strongly political cast as well, buttressing an anti-communist ideology. We can see this elision in the book’s photographs; Marx, Trotsky, Mühsam, Luxemburg, and Leviné are among those who make their appearance in the cataloguing of the Jewish racial type. Anti-Semitism, as we have seen, was central to counter-revolutionary politics.

The purported homogeneity of the Jewish race was central to the anti-Semitism of racial science, but was animated by a profound contradiction. While a fear of racial mixing ran through the culture of the Weimar period, the openness to other races that Clauß had described as a powerful yet dangerous characteristic of the German character meant that mixing was inevitable. Indeed, Günther even acknowledged that ‘most Germans, as in general most people in Europe (and indeed also in other parts of the world), are mixed-race [*Mischlinge*]’.³³³ Mixed-marriage likewise threatened Jewish racial homogeneity, he argued,³³⁴ but this was less common than with the Nordic race. The danger of mixing, Günther argued, was due to the particular pathological profile of each race that made them more or less susceptible to different conditions. Thus, Jews suffered less from such conditions as typhus, malaria, epilepsy, or uterine cancer, but were more susceptible to hysteria, dementia praecox (schizophrenia), and various other mental illnesses, conditions that, as we have seen, were prominent sources of degeneration.³³⁵ Racial theorists were thus presented with a contradictory situation in which Jews, the greatest threat to German racial hygiene, simultaneously embodied a purity that those

331 In his *Small Racial Ethnology of the German People*, he argues that Jews were related to the Dinaric race, but that they had migrated to and through Europe from Asia (Günther 1929, pp. 51–52). Because they were deemed as non-European they were also peripheral in his work on German racial ethnology.

332 Günther 1930b, p. 208.

333 Günther 1930a, p. 255.

334 Günther 1930b, pp. 295–306.

335 Günther 1930b, pp. 271–72.

theorists themselves desired. Indeed, Jewish purity was itself at the heart of their threat.

These contradictions go a long way towards explaining the irrational fury of anti-Semitism, and particularly the emergence of an eliminationist anti-Semitism that drew on the conceptions of degeneration that we saw in the last chapter in relation to people with physical and developmental disabilities. Again aesthetic characteristics came to the fore. Citing Eugen Fischer's influential 1913 study of the so-called 'Rehobother Bastards' in his discussion of miscegenation,³³⁶ Günther used much the same language that we saw in descriptions of the degenerative threat posed by people with disabilities. Races were thus said to express their own 'image of beauty' (*Schönheitsbild*) with 'a disruption of the image of beauty' occurring as a result of racial mixing. Purity and aesthetic beauty were therefore identical: '[t]he racially pure person of any race can ultimately be described as "beautiful": his somatic and thus also his psychic nature is unified, and every feature of his body and his nature points to the same somatic and psychic tendencies'.³³⁷ Here we see the classical Greek ideal of bodily symmetry and harmony evident in *Ways to Strength and Beauty* recast in explicitly racial terms.

While Günther's work had a significant reach, it was in the popular 'race novels' (*Rassenromane*) that the dangers of miscegenation – especially between Aryans and Jews – gained their widest audience. Artur Dinter's 1917 *Sin Against the Blood* (*Die Sünde wider das Blut*), one of the most widely read books of the 1920s, was the most infamous of these. Dinter tells the story of a tragic hero Hermann, a German (read: Aryan) scientist who goes to work for a German-Jewish businessman who, we discover, married a beautiful Aryan woman after raping her. Hermann falls in love with their daughter, Elisabeth, but their courtship and marriage are marked by the curse of her mixed blood. The Aryan blood of her mother seems dominant, but to the careful observer, her mixed blood is evident in the one 'blemish on her beauty', a thick and pendulous lower lip.³³⁸ This blemish is the bodily marker of a deeper conflict raging within her. Her German blood (*Germanenblut*) was 'being befouled through the strange, impure blood originating from the darkest chaos of peoples [*Völkerchaos*]'.³³⁹

These race novels, Christine von Braun argues, involved the translation of the incest taboo (which by this time had lost much of its literary power) into

336 Günther 1930a, pp. 253–54. I discussed this work in the previous chapter.

337 Günther 1930a, p. 259.

338 Dinter 1920, p. 97.

339 Dinter 1920, p. 103.

one of blood and race.³⁴⁰ This is evident in the novel not only in the traces of racial degeneration suggested by Elisabeth's lip, but also in the monstrous baby that results from their union.

A dark-skinned something unlike a human, with pitch-black, curly hair screamed contrarily at him [Hermann]. Dark, dark eyes that seemed to have a blue sheen to them blinked at him from under long black lashes, looking out of an ancient face. A flattened nose gave the head a somewhat ape-like appearance.³⁴¹

The child, which looks like the paternal grandfather, is diagnosed as a case of atavism.³⁴² Hermann, whose research projects are consistently configured in terms of their Germanness, ignores his hideous child and begins reading up on theories of atavism and the dangers of racial mixing.³⁴³ This sets up a long detour through racial theory, with the discussion supplemented by over 50 pages of endnotes directing the reader to scientific research on the topic. The novel becomes a kind of documentary fiction, a hybrid work that we might conceptualise as a kind of racist agitprop literature.

The novel itself provides a justification for such pedagogical literature. Both Elisabeth and her father die, leaving Hermann with a vast inheritance. Going through his father-in-law's papers, Hermann finds not only that he controlled a network of parasitic companies with money in Swiss and Swedish banks, but that he was party to a Jewish plan to buy up provincial newspapers in order to undermine the nationalist ideas of God, Kaiser, and Fatherland and replace them with the sinister slogans 'Freedom and Progress' and 'Equality and Brotherhood'.³⁴⁴ Hermann tries to atone for his sins against German blood and to counteract his father-in-law's conspiratorial machinations. He uses his inheritance to fund an Institute for Racial Research and Racial Hygiene – mirroring actual institutes established over the course of the first decades of the twentieth century – as well as newspapers designed to break the Jewish

340 Braun 1995, pp. 127–48.

341 Dinter 1920, p. 238.

342 On theories of atavism, see Person 2005.

343 This atavistic danger erupts again later in the novel. Hermann has a baby with another woman, an Aryan woman in this case, but again the baby emerges with Jewish characteristics. This was the woman's second child; her first had been fathered by a Jewish man and, the novel indicates, the animal world shows us that when a woman is impregnated by a man from a 'less worthy race', her whole organism is corrupted and poisoned (Dinter 1920, p. 350).

344 Dinter 1920, p. 282.

media monopoly. In the novel's paranoid racist fantasies, racial science and its popular pedagogical projects were crucial in defending and transforming the German *Volkskörper*. This broader racial paranoia was the product, as Michael Hau argues of Günther, of a profound crisis in the *Bildungsbürgertum* expressed through the racialised body.³⁴⁵

That racial crisis, Günther argued, involved what he called 'de-nordification' (*entnordung*). As we saw, he believed that all races (especially the Nordic) were characterised by degrees of mixing, but that this was becoming an existential threat: '[t]oday the continued existence of the innermost core of the race is endangered'.³⁴⁶ His book traces this threat, but it is also a call to action. The final chapter is called 'the task' (*Die Aufgabe*), an exhortation to reverse these trends: '[d]egeneration (that is, a powerful increase in inferior genetic material) and *de-Nordification* (that is, a decrease in the purely Nordic segment of the population) have led to the 'decline' of every Indogermanic people; an increase in the productive, healthy genetic material and an increase in the proportion of Nordic blood must accordingly lead to a new ascent'.³⁴⁷

This ascent 'is only possible through the blood and spirit of the Nordic race'.³⁴⁸ In his popular *Small Racial Ethnology of the German People*, Günther places significant stress on the social hygienic roots of de-nordification. Familiar themes like the falling birth rate and the contra-selective impacts of the First World War present the most pressing threats to the Nordic racial elements in the German population.³⁴⁹ As I noted in the introduction to the book, the theory of contra-selection held that social welfare practices had reversed the evolutionary trend that allowed the fitter to survive, a tendency that the War, which exacted such a deadly toll on the more worthy strata of society, exacerbated. The decline of the Nordic race could only be reversed if it again becomes 'numerous, child-rich'.³⁵⁰

There is a telling slippage in Günther's argument here in the way that the biological basis of race becomes a matter of will. Günther's 're-nordification' (*aufnordung*) was promoted by the Nordic movement as a mechanism for racial regeneration. In many ways his work thus echoed that of the radical right we saw in the second chapter, in particular in his invocation of Splenglerian themes of decline, promoting a 'Faustian programme' of the German people 'to

345 Hau 2003, pp. 151–53.

346 Günther 1930a, p. 472.

347 Günther 1930a, p. 462. I borrow this translation from Gray 2004, pp. 247–48.

348 Günther 1930a, p. 463.

349 Günther 1929, pp. 133–35.

350 Günther 1930a, p. 464.

work anew towards a pure Nordic race through the will!’³⁵¹ At the same time, though, Günther and other racial theorists eschewed the male fundamentalism and male onto-genesis that characterised the work of Jünger, Spengler, and others in favour of a more biological conception of race. Reproduction rather than militarised and machinic masculine self-production remains at the centre of racial theory, with regeneration produced through the regrounding of purportedly Nordic gender and sexual relations. This is captured in photographic images of students engaging in physical exercise in German schools that he introduced into the 1930 edition of his book. Presented on facing pages, ideal Nordic types, male and female, march towards each other in a sublimated gendered and sexualised portrait of the new racial order.

These images are telling in that they capture precisely those embodied figures that Kracauer identified as elements in the mass ornament. If, as Kracauer put it, the mass ornament was ‘the aesthetic reflex of the rationality to which the prevailing economic system aspires’, we need to be attentive to the particular ways in which this rationality was configured. Thus, while Günther’s images of physical exercise drew on the body culture movement, they were far more reductive in their racialised conceptions of these body practices than was the case with the managerial approach that dominated an exhibition like *Gesolei* or the ecstatic tone of a film like *Ways to Strength and Beauty*. Those too built on conceptions of social and racial health, but Günther’s athletic bodies can only be understood in relation to the serried rows of photographs that his book presents, their rationalised organisation cementing the measurements of the craniometer and other anthropometric measuring devices. Racial theory radicalised the rationalising logic of capitalist modernity, seeking to overcome its contradictions through the increasingly violent positing of a desire for racial purity. The athletic bodies were not simply representations of that racial purity, but more importantly racial warriors, those whose ‘task’ was to bring that purity into being. This was a far more directed, repressive, and essentialised conception of race than that which underlay bourgeois conceptions of social hygiene.

While Günther’s work became increasingly influential over the course of the Weimar period, it was only after 1933 that his arguments were taken up in the implementation of state policy. A savage critique in the communist satirical paper *Eulenspiegel* in 1931 anticipated what such a future science of the *völkisch* state might look like (Ill. 27). The full page spread included four caricatures, each suggesting the absurdities that would govern scientific study should the Nazis come to power. Theology and jurisprudence are the first two,

351 Günther 1930a, p. 476.

Die Wissenschaft im völkischen Staat

(Zeichnung: SAUER)



Theologie. Wotan wird zum Generalsuperintendenten erhoben. Das Alte Testament wird aus dem Verkehr gezogen.



Jurisprudenz. Es gibt keine Gerechtigkeit mehr, sondern nur noch Justiz. Diese wird den Leitern der Sturmabteilungen übertragen.



Rassenlehre. Wird als besonderes Fach an allen Universitäten eingeführt. Im Studio erhalten alle rassereinen deutschen Schädel den Koscher-Stempel aufgedrückt. Goebbels, Rosenberg und Brönnel werden außer-ordentlich für rasserein erklärt.



Medizin. Anschauungsunterricht in der Anatomie an jüdischen und kommunistischen Objekten, wie man am besten kilt. Für Fememörder Examinationserleichterung.

ILLUSTRATION 27 'Die Wissenschaft im völkischen Staat' ('Science in the völkisch State'), in Eulenspiegel, Feb. 1931, 4, 2: 21.

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followed by racial science and medicine. Under racial science, the caption reads in part that racial science: 'Will be introduced as a special faculty in all universities. In the lab, all racially pure German skulls will be marked with a kosher-stamp'. Under medicine, the caption reads: 'Teaching demonstrations on the anatomy of Jewish and communist objects, how one can best kill them. For political murderers [*Fememörder*] an easier exam'.

By 1931 the threat that the racial therapies promoted by Günther, Clauß, Dinter, and others could actually be realised was far more real than when Günther first published his *Racial Ethnology of the German People* in 1922. The political threats that *Eulenspiegel* read out of such racial science were increasingly in evidence as well, with the murder of leftists and perceived leftists again on the increase. As the cartoons suggest, right-wing movements responsible for these attacks mobilised around racist practices, racial science providing the legitimisation (here called with bitter irony a 'kosher-stamp') for this violence. By the late Weimar years the Depression had taken hold, and the limited social, political, and economic gains that resulted from the post-War conflicts were increasingly under attack from capital and the state. Thus, if the mass ornament described by Kracauer was the aesthetic reflex of capitalist logic more generally, its specific manifestation in this period of sharpening conflict was a rationalisation increasingly integrated with racial science and racist practice, producing a new and deadly vision of the *Volkskörper*.

Earlier I described Dinter's *Sin Against the Blood* as a kind of agitprop literature of the racist and exterminationist radical right. While written in a different idiom, Günther's work shared this pedagogical purpose, producing an alternative social hygiene that radicalised the social hygienic tendencies we looked at earlier in the chapter. The visual played a central role in these developments, with racial theory explicitly configured as a kind of visual pedagogy. The 'photo-eye' produced by Günther, Clauß, and other racial theorists, however, implied a way of seeing radically different from the optical hygiene promoted by the avant-garde. What I have argued in this chapter, though, is that the avant-garde response, the socialist vision promoted by people like Moholy-Nagy, was largely inadequate as a response to this radical right vision. The avant-garde's utopian project lacked a sense of the social mediations of vision, and thus presented only a weak challenge to either state-driven hygienic practices of film and photography exemplified by the documentary film movement, or the emergent racist right. By fetishising visual technologies themselves, they were unable to grasp the extent to which those technologies were the product of social forces.

It was this context that the *Eulenspiegel* caricature addressed, providing a radical critique of the social bases of the new science. While there were major limitations to the communist response to the rise of the right, this commitment to a radical social critique ran through the aesthetic and political responses of the KPD and other radical left movements in the later Weimar years. Especially on the margins of or outside the Party, movements arose that recognised the profoundly important role played by a repressive politics of the body in reactionary politics. They sought to challenge the cultural logic of the radical right through the production of a radical politics that addressed the aesthetics of embodiment. In the concluding chapter I will take up some of these forms of cultural production in order to think through the debates over and possibilities of a revolutionary aesthetic practice in the context of the violent struggles of the later Weimar years.

Revolution and the Degeneration of the Weimar Republic: Worker Culture and the Rise of Fascism

6.1 Introduction

In 1932 an extended controversy over politics and obscenity erupted around the film *Kuhle Wampe, or, Who Owns the World* (*Kuhle Wampe, oder: Wem gehört die Welt?*). Produced by the left-wing film company Prometheus,¹ the film was the result of a collaboration between the playwright Bertolt Brecht, the director Slatan Dudow, the writer Ernst Ottwalt, and the composer Hanns Eisler, although today it tends to be remembered primarily as a translation of Brecht's theatrical innovations to the big screen. Seeing the film primarily as Brecht's work is incorrect, however. Not only was it deliberately conceived of as a collaborative production between the different named figures, the film's aesthetic also reflected a broader proletarian and Marxist cultural milieu that promoted collective forms of expression. The communist sport and body culture movements and the 'Red Megaphone' (*Rote Sprachrohr*) agitprop theatrical troupe, both of which appeared in *Kuhle Wampe*, were two of the collective actors playing key roles in this cultural scene.

In the case of *Kuhle Wampe*, these collective efforts produced a film that eschewed a conventional dramatic narrative while also resisting purely formalist experimentation. But it was the film's politics that brought it to the attention of the censors. As we saw in the previous chapter, the provisions of the Motion Picture Law (the *Lichtspielgesetz*) were frequently used to censor or ban left-wing productions. *Kuhle Wampe* suffered both fates: initially banned, it was released only after the imposition of a number of cuts. Brecht, of course, deplored the censors' decision, but, in commenting on the text of their decision, he nevertheless noted their astute reading of the film's aesthetics and politics, writing in 1932 that the censor

had penetrated far deeper into the essence of our artistic intentions than our most supportive critics. He had taught a short course on realism. From the perspective of the police.²

¹ For a good general discussion of the film, see Silberman 2009.

² 'Short Contribution on the Theme of Realism', in Brecht 2000, p. 209.

The collective nature of the film's production, which was evident at various levels, was central to its political intent. The workers' theatre movement provided one important influence, with Brecht himself having worked with agit-prop theatre movements, and Ernst Busch, a popular actor in workers' theatre, was cast in a lead role in the film. Ottwalt, the film's writer, was a member of the League of Proletarian-Revolutionary Writers (*Bund Proletarisch-revolutionärer Schriftsteller*, or BPRS) that worked to develop a proletarian literature.³ While these influences were crucial, however, the film also reflected the roots of many of the collaborators in avant-garde traditions, with Brecht himself tracing a familiar trajectory from Expressionism to his later communist art. The influence of the avant-garde was evident in the Constructivist principles of montage that shaped the film, but it was also there in a desire shared with worker culture movements for the abolition of art as a separate sphere. Indeed, one of the notable aspects of *Kuhle Wampe* was that it reflected a growing if still grudging acceptance of avant-garde approaches by the KPD, a tendency also evident in the Party's endorsement of artists like George Grosz or John Heartfield.

The focus of this chapter is on these left cultural movements and the debates that they generated in the later Weimar years. Combining aspects of avant-garde practice with a broader commitment to a collective aesthetic, a host of movements affiliated with the political left, in particular the KPD, emerged in this period. These developments were especially evident in the establishment of extensive networks seeking to produce forms of worker culture. Ranging from literature to photography, theatre, and film, these movements for worker culture gathered steam in the late Weimar years, becoming one of the most significant areas of successful radical left mobilisation. It was especially in areas that I examined in the last chapter, in new media such as photography and film, that worker culture took hold, although radical theatre arguably provided the most participatory cultural form available. *Kuhle Wampe* itself was the product of one such endeavour, the communist-oriented film company Prometheus – which had gone bankrupt before the film could be released. The company distributed and produced a number of important films before collapsing under the weight of its debt and the growing costs of film production associated with the introduction of sound film.⁴ In the context of growing fascist influence both at the ballot box and in violent contestations over public space, the cultural sphere offered the left a space in which to develop political

3 On Brecht's links with agitprop, see Bodek 1996, pp. 137–57. On the BPRS, see Friedrich 1981.

4 Murray 1990, pp. 218–19. The film only came out after securing financing from the Swiss company Praesens-Film.

responses and, I will argue, reenergise some of the radical emancipatory practices that had emerged in the early Weimar years.

This chapter develops an analysis of these different left media practices, building on the examination in earlier chapters of debates over aesthetics and politics, the role of the avant-garde, the development of new media such as film and photography, and the politics of embodiment. There are a number of key arguments that cut through this chapter, and that bring together the different themes running through this book. First, I argue here that while the KPD tended to focus their energies on the violent confrontations in the streets, producing a rigid and masculinist politics in which they were consistently on the defensive, the cultural sphere provided much more varied and creative forms of resistance to the rise of the right while also generating alternative and at times oppositional political approaches to those of the KPD and other major actors on the left. Much like in Munich and elsewhere in 1918–19, then, we see in the later Weimar years a powerful cross-fertilisation between the cultural and the political.

My second argument is that this development was somewhat contradictory. The space for cultural mobilisation had opened up and gained prominence precisely because of the structural weakness of the revolutionary left in this period. The debates on the left over aesthetics and politics in these years thus drew on earlier arguments, those we saw in prior chapters, but were also shaped by these specific contexts of the weakness of the left. A complicating factor, though, was the fact that the KPD offered analyses of the situation, most notably in the idea of 'social fascism', that misread the dynamics of the situation to the extent that weakness was sometimes read as strength. Finally, the third argument running through this chapter returns us to the question of embodiment. As was so often the case, it was in the cultural sphere that the politics of embodiment received the most critical attention on the left, and this was no exception during these later years. As we saw in the previous two chapters, in art and in new media ideas of a transformed body and subjectivity returned often as an ideal (or fear) in the cultural politics of the left. Rather than incidental elements in cultural and political developments, I have argued that the politics of embodiment needs to be brought into the heart of our analyses not only of Weimar history, but of our theorisation of capitalist modernity more broadly. These arguments inform the discussion here, emerging most explicitly in the consideration of the struggle for the decriminalisation of abortion that proved to be one of the most significant political developments of the later Weimar years. By focusing on the politics of reproduction and embodiment, this mobilisation took on the right where it was strongest, on the terrain of the

Volkskörper, and managed to win some of the most significant victories in what was an increasingly bleak period.

We can see the importance of these different arguments, beginning with the politics of embodiment, if we turn back to *Kuhle Wampe* in particular, and Brecht's work in general. In the film, as we shall see later, the politics of the body was most evident in its engagement with the abortion question, but it was in a Brechtian aesthetics that this embodied dimension emerged as central to a radical cultural politics. Thus, both here and in the final section of the chapter, I will turn to Brecht as a way of thinking through the major themes of this book. This aspect of Brecht's work is only intermittently discussed in critical commentary, even though Brecht's bodily aesthetics was noted already by a number of early critics. Thus, in 1922 Herbert Jhering wrote of his early Expressionist-influenced plays like *Baal* and *Drums in the Night* that 'Brecht bodily feels the chaos and decay'.⁵ This concern with the material body remained after Brecht's turn to Marx and his development of the epic theatre. As Walter Benjamin says of Galy Gay, the protagonist of *Man Equals Man* (initially staged in 1926, but rewritten thereafter), he 'is nothing but a bodying forth of the contradictions which make up our society. One might go so far as to see the "wise man", in the Brechtian sense, as the perfect bodying forth of its dialectics'.⁶

Benjamin's use of the phrase 'bodying forth' is quite deliberate, emphasizing the body as the material vehicle for political meaning and transformation. In this sense Brecht's politics reflects the embodied reading of Marx that I developed in the introduction to the book. For Benjamin, it was epic theatre's bodily impact on the audience that was the key element in Brecht's work, one that arguably paralleled the revolutionary 'bodily collective innervation' that, as we saw in the third chapter, he found in Surrealism.⁷ Brecht's approach drew in this respect on a number of other currents in radical theatre, most notably on agitprop and on Erwin Piscator's earlier experiments with political theatre. The common element in these different forms of theatre was the attempt to undermine the distinction between stage and spectator, thereby provoking a sense of the incommensurability between dramatic and social conditions. Brecht's famous 'estrangement effect' (*Verfremdungseffekt*, alternately translated as 'alienation' or 'defamiliarisation') thus sought to produce a participatory reworking of the consciousness of the audience through the

5 'Der Dramatiker Bert Brecht', in Jhering 1987, p. 98.

6 'What is the Epic Theater? (11)', in Benjamin 2003, p. 303.

7 'Surrealism', in Benjamin 1999b, p. 217.

theatrical spectacle. The audience's response was profoundly embodied, enacted through gesture and confrontation, and designed to undermine the passive spectatorial relationship fostered in classical theatre.⁸

Elements of the epic theatre found their way into *Kuhle Wampe*, particularly in the use of montage as a strategy of estrangement.⁹ As pioneered by Sergei Eisenstein, Vsevolod Pudovkin, and other Soviet filmmakers, montage undermined the conventions of narrative film, deploying an aesthetics of shock that sought to disrupt passive spectatorship. Thus, where the melodramatic street films we saw in the previous two chapters focused primarily on individuals and read their development through the lens of social de- and re-generation, *Kuhle Wampe* sought to produce a recognition in the audience based not on melodramatic identification with a character or narrative arc, but through a critical reflection on the social conditions and contradictions that produced hardship. Only by producing this visceral response could these conditions be rendered visible as objects of potential transformation.

The use of montage is evident in the opening sequences of *Kuhle Wampe*, where the bodily dimensions of this technique are also revealed. The famous scenes of frantic riders pedalling bicycles through the streets of the city in search of work are interspersed with mesmerising shots of spinning bicycle wheels. This is disorienting for the spectator, evoking at once the dynamism of the working-class riders and the futility of their search for work. This profoundly dialectical image, to use Benjamin's term, is thus at once about the specific hardships of Depression-era Weimar, and an evocation of the logic of capital more broadly, itself simultaneously embodying a powerful dynamism and an alienating repetition. The disorientation created by this mesmerising sequence does not seek to produce a closed filmic world, but rather to destabilise the spectatorial relationship and open the film up to the social world. Thus Brecht argues that in dramatic theatre 'the spectator is in the thick of it [the action], shares the experience', while in epic theatre 'the spectator stands outside, studies'.¹⁰ Benjamin notes the roots of epic theatre in film in this respect. 'Like the images in a film, the epic theatre moves in spurts. Its basic form is that of the shock with which the individual, well-defined situations of a play

8 See especially 'Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting', in Brecht 1964, pp. 91–99. 'Estrangement', he argues, is created when an actor 'acts in such a way that nearly every sentence could be followed by a verdict of the audience and practically every gesture is submitted for the public's approval' (p. 95). For a detailed examination of Brecht's aesthetic theories, see White 2004.

9 Kirn 2007.

10 'The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre', in Brecht 1964, p. 37.

collide'.¹¹ With this shock can come a recognition of the true state of social relations and, most importantly, of the possibility of their transformation.

The organisation of *Kuhle Wampe* reflected Brecht's insistence that in epic theatre different scenes exist for their own sake. The film tells the story of the Bönike family in a series of loosely connected scenes that act as interventions into the social life of the late Weimar years. The initial sequence, beginning with a montage of newspaper headlines showing the growing levels of unemployment and the bicycle scene of workers' futile search for work, is entitled 'one unemployed worker less'. The search for work sets the stage for the suicide of the young Bönike son, who is unable to cope with his inability to find work, as well as the subsequent eviction of the family from their home. The scene thus encapsulates the economic situation of the Depression. Within this opening act we are also confronted by the petit-bourgeois values of the family. These values become the focus of the second part when the Bönikes are forced to move to 'Kuhle Wampe', the name of a tent colony by the Müggel Lake, where we are witness to the contradictory nature of working-class life in which the petit-bourgeois pleasures of excessive drink and celebration compensate for the depredations of everyday life. It is here that Anni, the Bönike daughter and main character in the film, begins to challenge her parents' petit-bourgeois values. Those values are further tested when Anni becomes pregnant by her boyfriend Fritz, a young worker who resists the family's push to have them marry. She eventually takes matters into her own hands, procuring an abortion with the help of her friends. Fritz and Anni then reunite through the medium of a communist sports festival, where their political and personal maturation is cemented through the collective life of the radical body culture movement. In spite of her travails, Anni retains a strong autonomy that stands in stark contrast to the repressive milieu of her family. The film ends with the worker-activists arguing on a train about global economic relations and coming to the realisation – which speaks directly to the audience of the film – that only they can change the world.

The film's interconnected themes – work, unemployment, love, marriage and pregnancy – are all subjects spectators can easily identify with, but the story is told in a way that disrupts conventional narratives. The fragmented structure of the film was intended to produce a sense of estrangement blocking individualist and melodramatic resolutions, although not all critics at the time felt that it attained this aesthetic and political goal. While strongly defending the film against its censorship and supporting its political direction, Rudolf Arnheim argued that 'the actual plot of the film is not political. . . . The

11 'What is the Epic Theater? (II)', in Benjamin 2003, p. 306.

filmmakers' aversion to a plot which might be too individual, which was probably mistaken for one that is individualistic, has led to the film's failure to point out the mechanisms of the ruling system – and the necessary political conclusion of those concerned – using a single instructive incident.¹² Arnheim's argument, though, betrays a desire for a political art in the more didactic sense, one in which film's role would be to lift the veil and reveal the true secret of an exploitative social order. This comment takes us back to familiar debates over aesthetics and politics. For Brecht, while the didactic moment was crucial, by itself such an aesthetic ran the risk of being undialectical, falling back in the process on older bourgeois conceptions of art. What was needed was a theatre that eschewed nostalgic dreams of either an integrated collective or an autonomous individual, that refused merely formalist avant-garde experimentation, and that thereby intervened in a fractured and alienated collective consciousness in ways that opened up the possibility of its revolutionary transformation.

In a recent analysis, Theodore Rippey argues that the political locus of the film lay in its corporeal dimensions. '*Kuhle Wampe* suggests that the battle for the future will turn not so much on a direct seizure of economic power as on a successful campaign to catalyze a reimagination of modern subjectivity in collective terms'.¹³ This notion of subjectivity is evident in the film's utilisation of the integrated spectacles of the agitprop theatre and its endorsement of the sport and body culture movement. Through these means *Kuhle Wampe* produces a critical excavation of what Rippey calls the 'corporeal-political unconscious'.¹⁴ This formulation points precisely to the ways in which capitalist cultural logics are embodied, with the film seeking to generate a response in the spectator-participants by which those engrained bodily forms can be reworked. While his Foucaultian approach tends to downplay the socio-political dimensions of the film, Rippey's emphasis on this corporeal-political unconscious identifies precisely where the film diverges from the purely didactic. With the boundaries between spectacle and spectator rendered permeable and unstable, it turns instead to an aesthetics and politics of estrangement in which the proletarian audience played an active role. Rippey goes too far in his rereading, however, ignoring the extent to which the didactic moment remains, as with the final sequence with the workers on the train. In political terms, the film is about *both* the direct seizure of economic power *and* the reimagining of modern subjectivity and embodiment. Both moments are required.

12 '*Kuhle Wampe*' in Arnheim 1997, p. 93.

13 Rippey 2007, p. 14.

14 Rippey 2007, p. 13.

This is not to say that *Kuhle Wampe* entirely avoids the hackneyed tropes of socialist hygiene in its corporeal politics. Petit-bourgeois values, for example, are embodied in the figure of the corpulent uncle Otto, a caricature juxtaposed with the disciplined and 'healthy' bodies of the worker athletes. In these instances, as Rippey argues more generally, the film envisions a *differently* disciplined body rather than one simply emancipated from repression. More often, though, the film's presentation of embodied capitalist labour and social life is rather more complex. Instead of the separated realms of public and private that we find in commercial film, the private sphere of the family, the public sphere of the streets, and the realm of production are all interconnected in *Kuhle Wampe*, the different forms of life reflecting different facets of a capitalist totality. One especially significant moment in this respect is in the depiction of Anni's workplace, typical in its alienating and rationalised labour process. This scene is telling given the earlier depiction of unemployed male workers, a juxtaposition that suggests the feminising of labour that, as we have seen, was one tendency at work in the period that was reshaping both everyday life and the working-class movement. Unlike many left accounts – most notably the attacks on 'double-earners' that had gained traction again as early as 1926 when the Reich Ministry of Labour urged employers not to hire such women – women's labour here is not presented as a threat to male workers.¹⁵ Further, by tying Anni's labour to a sympathetic reading of abortion, the film offers a profound challenge to both bourgeois and left conceptions of gendered embodiment in which women were unproblematically associated with a reproductive labour divorced from production. Here these gendered spheres are read as inextricably linked, their modes of exploitation mutually interdependent.

The film was responding to the growing unemployment and hardship that characterised the Depression and the sharpening political conflicts that it engendered. It is here that we can see the extent to which the politics of embodiment was intimately linked with broader political developments. This returns us as well to the other two major themes running through this chapter, the emergence of new forms of cultural politics on the left, and the weakness of the left that limited these developments. The contradictory nature of the revolutionary left's situation in the later Weimar years becomes evident when we look at their place in the political landscape. By some measures, one could argue that this period marked the high-point of communist organising. The

15 Glass 1979, p. 345. Frieda Glass's report, originally written in 1927, argues that the growing employment of women was due to shifts in the structure of the economy, and should therefore not be blamed on women.

KPD achieved its greatest electoral success in the 6 November 1932 elections, finishing third just behind the SPD with 16.8% of the vote, and throughout these years communist activists played leading roles in the political and street battles against the rise of the right.¹⁶ While these successes were significant, they were not indicative of a greater strength. By the early 1930s the social bases of the KPD and the broader radical left were being dramatically undermined. The Depression and skyrocketing unemployment hit workers hard. The practice of laying off politically active workers, particularly communists, also led to a steep decline in activism on the shop floor, leaving the KPD and communist trade unions with a very weak base in workplaces, an unfortunate development for a party of the working class.

For David Abraham, as I indicated in the introduction to the book, the weakness of the left as a whole was due to fundamental shifts in class relations stemming from the economic crisis. The years of stability in the Weimar era had been founded on a power bloc, led by the export sectors of the economy, that gained its legitimacy from a reformist working class. This collaboration 'stabilized the dominance of the former [the power bloc] by at once rewarding and depoliticizing the latter [the reformist working class]' through welfare provisions and a rising standard of living.¹⁷ What changed in the later Weimar years, Abraham argues, is that these reformist measures became unsustainable in the context of 'an economic crisis that was, in good measure, a profit crisis engendered by a militant-reformist labor movement. This circumstance left republican and socialist politicians with little room for maneuver, facilitated the growth of right radicalism, and eventually encouraged the migration of parts of business into the radical-right camp'.¹⁸ This enabled the radical right resurgence of these years, but also meant that the SPD and trade unions, by virtue of their reformist character, were painted into a corner. By defending the welfare state but offering no systemic challenge to capital, reformism was 'paralyzing capitalism without being able to transform it'.¹⁹ The result was the delegitimation of the Republic as the assault on its institutions, in particular the welfare state, gained momentum and a search for an '[e]xtrasystemic solution' developed.²⁰ Social welfare became a much more prominent locus of political

16 On electoral returns, see Freytag 2010, pp. 244–45. On the politics of the street, see Rosenhaft 1983; Voigt 2009; Schumann 2009; Swett 2004.

17 Abraham 1986, p. 31.

18 Abraham 1989, p. 27.

19 Abraham 1989, p. 29.

20 Abraham 1986, p. 303.

struggle on the left,²¹ but fascism also 'reappeared as a mass party and as a possible political alternative through which the interests of the dominant bloc might be represented less directly, but more effectively than they had been'.²²

The rapid rise of the Nazis led to a reshaping of the politics of the right. The Nazi surge eclipsed the earlier radical right currents represented by Ernst Jünger, Oswald Spengler, and others discussed in previous chapters. As we saw in the second chapter, that earlier radical right had likewise emerged in the context of the delegitimisation of the state, but in that case it was the Imperial state and the right fought to block the progress of revolutionary left mobilisations. While the radical right in the later Weimar years was in the process of establishing a much broader power base and engaging in offensive rather than defensive action, Abraham stresses that the ruling bloc was by no means united in its support for the Nazis. Other currents existed, although fights within the right, in particular in the DNVP, ensured that conservatives less implacably opposed to the republican order lost much of their influence. Especially after Alfred Hugenberg's election as the DNVP party chair in October 1928, moderate conservatives no longer had a home in the Party, removing an important alternative to Nazism on the right.²³ The Nazi Party was thus able to obtain significant levels of support in a very short period, with their appeal based on their ability to tap into the anxieties of the period, especially in some social sectors. As Dirk Blasius puts it, '[t]he National Socialists were not elected on tactical grounds; people felt them to be the defenders of bourgeois security'.²⁴ This is an argument that in some respects has its roots in Kracauer's analysis of the 'homeless' white-collar workers that we saw in the last chapter, who were one of the key class fractions in the Nazi base. It was precisely these intermediate strata that suffered acutely during the Depression, but whose increasingly proletarianised status was not recognised or addressed by either of the working-class parties.

These structural shifts opened up the space within which the street battles and neighbourhood politics of the late Weimar years played out. A combination of communist exclusion from workplaces and growing Nazi mobilisation made the street and public space key loci for political conflict. Because they took place between communists and Nazis, these battles are often presented as symptoms of a growing polarisation in which the 'totalitarian' tendencies of both radical right and left undermined the legitimacy of the parliamentary

21 Crew 1998b, pp. 235–37.

22 Abraham 1989, p. 54.

23 Jackisch 2012, pp. 159–84; Beck 2008.

24 Blasius 2005, p. 176.

Republic. As I argued in the introduction to the book, however, this totalitarian argument is fundamentally flawed. The political dynamics of the later Weimar years actually had much in common with the immediate post-War period. In both instances the right, often acting in collusion with the police and the SPD, worked to violently contain and suppress the revolutionary left. The crucial difference was that by this time the possibilities of a revolutionary transformation, already tenuous in 1918–19, had largely receded, with the radical right engaged in offensive rather than defensive counter-revolutionary action.

The KPD's response to this increasingly dire situation demonstrated a dramatic misjudgement of the balance of forces. In part their position was determined by the decision of the Sixth World Congress of the Comintern in 1928 that identified the main threat to the international working-class movement as social democracy and other 'reactionary' currents on the left, including even the right-wing of the KPD in Germany.²⁵ This decision confirmed Ernst Thälmann's ultra-left leadership of the KPD, and led the Party to endorse the idea of 'social fascism', the view that, by acting against the revolutionary left, the SPD represented a danger equivalent to or greater than fascism. The notion of social fascism was not simply a Comintern imposition, but also reflected the KPD's experience of SPD collusion with the state and right-wing forces to suppress the KPD. This had left a legacy of deep distrust amongst the Party's activist core.²⁶ Together these factors not only ensured that there would be no common front between the two left parties against fascism, they also severely limited the KPD's ability to make inroads with social-democratic workers. Not all agreed with the social fascism thesis, however, with oppositional groups splitting from the KPD over the need to develop a common front against fascism.²⁷

Perhaps the most damaging aspect of the social fascist argument was its corollary, namely the suggestion that growing class conflict was in fact a sign of a ripening revolutionary situation. The Comintern's position was that, after a first period of revolutionary upheaval from 1918–23 and a second period of relative stabilisation, a third period was being inaugurated in which the build-

25 Weber 1969, pp. 195–99. For an overview and collection of documents on the debate in the KPD, which frames it as a choice between the Luxemburgist tendency and Stalin, see Reuter et al. 2003.

26 Carsten Voigt, for example, argues in his study of Saxony that KPD activists who had experienced the failed uprising of 1923 tended later to take a rather absolutist line rejecting any cooperation with the SPD, thus giving the social fascist approach strong local roots strongly reinforcing Comintern policy (2009, pp. 506–8).

27 On the resistance of the KPD-Opposition and other left fractions that sought to maintain a pluralist party culture distanced from Soviet control to the KPD's 'social fascist' approach, see Bergmann 2001, pp. 68–71; Bois 2008, pp. 65–66.

ing of socialism in the Soviet Union would be matched by a sharpening of capitalist crisis in Germany and elsewhere.²⁸ The Nazis were thus viewed as a transient threat. This perspective represented a fundamental misreading of the balance of forces that, while not bearing the primary responsibility for the Nazi seizure of power, did render KPD attempts to counter the rise of fascism in many respects counter productive. It was only after the Nazi seizure of power that the social fascism perspective was dropped in favour of a Popular Front strategy.²⁹

This was the broader context in which cultural mobilisation took on a distinctive and especially important role. As I have noted, this mobilisation thus simultaneously reflected the deeper structural weakness of the left (a weakness ignored by the social fascist argument), and formed the basis for a potentially fruitful emancipatory politics (even if this only intermittently impacted on broader KPD organising). Especially given that the radical right's strength derived from their focus on a politics of the *Volkskörper*, this contradictory situation faced by the left was in many ways most evident in relation to the politics of embodiment, and the tendency of the KPD to ignore such questions contributed further to the weakness of their position. Their reinforcement of profoundly masculinist conceptions of militant action, coupled with the social fascism approach, blocked the Party's ability to expand or to even build a strong social base. This was what made a film like *Kuhle Wampe* so significant. By downplaying the importance of street politics in favour of a much deeper analysis of the need for a broad transformation of everyday social relations, petit-bourgeois subjectivity, and the embodied logic of capital, the film represented a powerful challenge to increasingly entrenched dimensions of KPD party culture. The cultural politics reflected in the film emerged out of the broader context of worker culture that will form the focus of this chapter.

The first section of the chapter looks at some of the theoretical debates around the idea of worker or proletarian culture, with specific focus on the press and literature. This section builds on the discussions of aesthetic and political theory in earlier chapters. The second section of the chapter provides an in-depth study of one example of this new model of the press: the worker-photographer movement that sought to reshape the media landscape. Worker-photographers produced new ways of seeing, a new 'photo-eye' that both drew on and significantly differed from the avant-garde idea of a transformation in subjectivity and embodiment that I discussed in the last chapter. Worker

28 Weber 1969, p. 198.

29 Fowkes 1984, pp. 157–66.

theatre and agitprop, the subject of the third section, went further in producing alternative forms of cultural representation while also developing a profoundly participatory practice. Agitprop, I contend, was rooted in the everyday social life of working-class communities, embodying a challenge to notions of art and culture as separate spheres, and thereby producing radically new forms of politics.

The fourth section of the chapter looks at one area where worker-theatre had a significant impact: the struggle for the decriminalisation of abortion. While this movement quickly faded from view, only rescued from obscurity more recently by feminist historians, it was in fact the most successful and wide-ranging mobilisation on the left in the later Weimar years. It is similar in both its obscurity and its significance to the mobilisations of women during the First World War that we saw in the second chapter. As was the case then, the struggle for the decriminalisation of abortion brought together a variety of radical political currents, and placed the politics of gender and reproduction, so central to configurations of the *Volkskörper* and to conceptions of degeneration, at the heart of left organising. In so doing, I will argue, it opened up emancipatory political possibilities that were increasingly closed off, certainly in society more generally, but also within the left. Given the Nazi focus on the politics of the *Volkskörper*, the movement for decriminalisation recognised the danger they posed in a way that the KPD, with its social fascism approach, did not. The political contestations of these years, I argue, thus represented the culmination of many of the processes described throughout this book. The cultural and political struggles on which this chapter focuses were the heirs of earlier emancipatory struggles that I have discussed earlier, and they offer a window onto alternate possibilities even as that window was closing.

6.2 Towards a Worker Culture

As I discussed in earlier chapters, the ebbing of the revolutionary wave over the course of the early Weimar period led to the reorganisation and reorientation of the KPD. The disastrous failures of the March Action and the events of 1923 led the Party to place a greater emphasis on parliamentary politics and also highlighted the need to reground the Party's base in the working class, a connection that had been severely weakened by its ultra-left shift. These developments took place in the context of a stabilising economy and the consolidation of the Republic. Propaganda work and the press became increasingly important in these circumstances. The KPD had established an extensive publishing network right from its infancy, drawing on the rich history of the

SPD press. The *Rote Fahne* (*Red Flag*) was the Party's flagship newspaper, and the KPD published 34 other dailies in addition to a range of other papers and journals.³⁰ At the same time, the early 1920s saw the development of a number of ventures aligned with but not institutionally part of the KPD, most notably Willi Münzenberg's various cultural endeavours. Münzenberg, who was close to Lenin, had founded the International Workers' Aid (*Internationale Arbeiterhilfe*, or IAH) in 1921 as an organisation dedicated to the support of the working-class movement around the world, and especially to the defence of the Soviet Union against the immediate threats of famine and the hostility of capitalist states.³¹ He was and is a controversial figure, often reductively condemned as a communist version of the manipulative right-wing media magnate Alfred Hugenberg.³²

A key part of IAH mobilisation came through Münzenberg's commitment to what I referred to as a 'visual pedagogy' in the last chapter. This was reflected first in the formation of the newspaper *Soviet Russia in Pictures* (*Sowjet Russland im Bild*), the inaugurator of a series of publications facilitated by Münzenberg that changed the media landscape of the Weimar left. *Soviet Russia in Pictures* was notable not only for its extensive use of photographs, but also for its attention to a range of concerns beyond the Party matters on which the KPD press tended to focus. *Soviet Russia in Pictures* became *Sickle and Hammer* (*Sichel und Hammer*), then the *Workers' Illustrated Newspaper* (*Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung*) in 1925; upon becoming a weekly in 1928, the latter adopted the abbreviation *AIZ* as its official name. Circulation grew rapidly, peaking at around 450,000 in 1931, leaving it second only to the commercial *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung* in total readership for an illustrated paper.³³ What distinguished the *AIZ* from publications like *Rote Fahne* was that it addressed the working class

30 Hempel-Küter 1989, p. 99.

31 Büthe et al., 1977, pp. 15–19; Cuevas-Wolf 2009, pp. 188–95.

32 This is the position that shapes the most extensive English biography of Münzenberg, Sean McMeekin's *The Red Millionaire* (2003). McMeekin gives a portrait of Münzenberg as a financial bungler, with his strong anti-communism meaning that he remains incapable of reading Münzenberg as anything other than manipulative, self-serving, and dangerous, his power limited mainly by his incompetence. A very different perspective is offered in Dugrand and Laurent (2008), who stress his media innovations and his ultimate opposition to Stalin in the aftermath of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 1939, with his murder the following year likely perpetrated on Soviet orders.

33 Morton 1985, p. 187. As Morton notes, these circulation figures are disputed, with left-wing presses possibly printing more copies than were sold, thereby inflating numbers (although advertising-driven commercial publications may well have done the same). Sabine Kriebel gives the peak circulation as 500,000 (2008, p. 104).

not primarily as Party members, but as a mass audience with a range of interests. In this sense it sought to create space for the left in a media landscape dominated by the commercial press; its extensive use of photographs was one of the key ways in which it did this.

Münzenberg argued that visual images, particularly photographs, had an intrinsic power to convey information. They were thus much more valuable than text-heavy theoretical pamphlets, especially in addressing workers who were not politically affiliated.³⁴ The visual pedagogical approach he brought to newspapers, his desire to produce politically progressive forms of culture that could reach a broad working-class audience, also drove an interest in film. Münzenberg set up the Aufbau-, Industrie- und Handels-AG in 1922 which was dedicated to importing Soviet films. When the government passed protectionist legislation in 1925 limiting film imports to firms that themselves produced films, Prometheus was founded, followed two years later by Weltfilm, with both producing communist-oriented films.³⁵ The great initial success of the former company was built on its importation of Sergei Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* to Berlin in 1926, which triggered a sensational response. This provided capital for the firm's own productions, which, as we saw earlier, included *Kuhle Wampe*.³⁶

These various projects in which Münzenberg was involved were responding to the challenges outlined in the previous chapter, seeking to deploy the new visual practices of photography and film in this case for the construction of new *working-class* subjectivities. What this meant in practice was an interesting if often contradictory amalgam of avant-garde ideas and worker-driven participatory cultural production. Münzenberg's successes were also one of the factors that led the KPD in the mid-1920s to pay more attention to cultural questions in relation to political organising, and even to accept the value of some avant-garde work. Gertrud Alexander, the Party's key cultural critic (who we met in previous chapters), backtracked on her earlier dismissal of avant-garde approaches by endorsing unnamed radical artists as 'fellow-fighters' in a 1924 article in *Sickle and Hammer*.³⁷ We can assume that the Dadaist George Grosz was one of those she had in mind given that the KPD was promoting

34 'Erobert den Film' in Münzenberg 1972, pp. 50–51.

35 'Erobert den Film' in Münzenberg 1972, pp. 60–61.

36 Murray 1990, pp. 118–21. There is some debate over whether or not *Battleship Potemkin* was as profitable as it seemed from its popularity. Again, the history of Münzenberg's cultural endeavours is far from clear, especially when it comes to financial matters.

37 Alexander 1924a. The article was accompanied by images of works by Diego Rivera, Georg Scholz, and the trade union building in Berlin designed by Max Taut.

him at the time as a true proletarian artist, although after 1925 Grosz's perceived elitism and negative portrayals of working-class figures meant that he fell increasingly out of favour.³⁸ Wieland Herzfelde and his publishing house Malik-Verlag was another that she may have had in mind. Malik-Verlag played an important role in expanding the influence of the avant-garde on the left, but it was his brother John Heartfield who arguably had the greatest impact. Heartfield's photomontages in the pages of the *AIZ* became icons in the Weimar period. Unlike many avant-garde artists, Heartfield was popular with workers as much as with the Party, although the latter, as we shall see, remained wary of photomontage more generally.

The hesitant turn to the avant-garde emerged in tandem with a growing focus on developing participatory worker-driven practices, a desire that the more radical avant-garde had long promoted (as we saw in the case of Munich), even though they often lacked real connections with a working-class constituency. As we shall see, *AIZ* pioneered the use of worker-photographers, and the KPD press also promoted 'worker-correspondents' as vital contributors.³⁹ This participatory culture had a longer history. The pre-War SPD had built up a strong set of cultural institutions in an effort to create a 'parallel culture' mirroring bourgeois associational culture.⁴⁰ Often, though, this parallel culture entailed a commitment to giving working-class audiences access to bourgeois culture. This endorsement of the bourgeois cultural heritage retained its importance on the left during the Weimar period, but those years, and especially the late 1920s and early 1930s, also saw the emergence of efforts to develop distinctively proletarian and participatory cultural forms. It was here that the avant-garde desire for the abolition of art as a separate sphere dovetailed with the participatory ideals of a proletarian culture.

Brecht was one of those who promoted this more radical challenge to the bourgeois cultural heritage. His concept of 're-functioning' (*Umfunktionierung*) provides a useful way of theorising some of the innovations that were being developed. Brecht acknowledged the power of commercial mass media and of other bourgeois cultural forms, but sought to rework them in the service of a radical political project. This approach entailed a strong pragmatism that put him at odds with the more rigorous commitments of the avant-garde to formal experimentation, but also with Marxist critics who promoted a realist aesthetic rooted in bourgeois traditions. Brecht's interventions in the Expressionism debates of the mid-1930s reflect his position between the different antagonists.

38 McCloskey 1997.

39 On the worker-correspondent movement, see Hempel-Küter 1989.

40 Lidtke 1985; Guttman 1990; Wunderer 1980.

Brecht accepted Lukács's critiques of Expressionism, but refused the idea that 'critical realism' was the only alternative. Rather, he argued that '[r]ealism is not a matter of form . . . Literary forms have to be checked against reality, not against aesthetics – even realist aesthetics. There are many ways of suppressing truth and many ways of stating it'.⁴¹ Re-functioning thus required a careful attention to systems of production and distribution. Radio, for instance, functioned as a one-way system of distribution in capitalist culture. To be 're-functionalized', Brecht argued in 1932, 'radio should step out of the supply business and organize its listeners as suppliers'.⁴² It was only through this kind of participatory production that new proletarian subjectivities could be engineered, a perspective that we saw as well with his work on *Kuhle Wampe*.

The debates over the nature of a new re-functioned proletarian culture developed most extensively in the field of literature. In October 1928, under the influence of the ideas of the Soviet RAPP, the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers (*Rossiyskaya Assotsiatsiya Proletarskikh Pisateley*), a group of writers formed the BPRS (the League of Proletarian-Revolutionary Writers) dedicated to the development of new forms of literary production 'from the standpoint of the revolutionary proletariat'.⁴³ This new organisation was aligned with the KPD, but it was formally separate and friendlier to cultural experimentation. The BPRS included a number of well-known radical writers, including Johannes Becher, the leading voice in the group, Egon Erwin Kisch, Berta Lask, and Ludwig Renn. These writers, who were predominantly of bourgeois origin, figured prominently in the group's activities and writings, but their publications also gave a significant voice to working-class writers. As Karl Grünberg noted in 1929, the proletarian-revolutionary writer looked to the BPRS to develop the skills necessary to produce a new literature, and to facilitate publication.⁴⁴ The main outlet for proletarian writing was the 'red-one-mark-series' inaugurated by the International Workers' Press, a series of cheap, mass-circulation paperbacks that published the work of prominent worker-writers like Willi Bredel and Hans Marchwitz.⁴⁵

The main organ for the BPRS where the debates over the contours of this new proletarian literature took place was the journal *Die Linkskurve* (*The Left Turn*). Founded in 1929, *Die Linkskurve* promulgated the view that proletarian culture had developed to such an extent that it no longer needed to cling to the

41 Quoted in Lunn 1982, p. 86.

42 'The Radio as a Communications Apparatus', in Brecht 2000, p. 42.

43 Becher 1979, p. 115.

44 Grünberg, 1979, p. 127.

45 See Biha, 1979, pp. 219–21.

old bourgeois literary forms. The journal itself had emerged out of a split in the *Gruppe 1925*, a fractious alliance of left-wing writers that included Becher and other communists, but also writers who rejected KPD cultural policy and the Party's increasingly hard-line political stance. Alfred Döblin was among the latter group, with the rift between him and Becher instrumental in provoking the split. The position of the editors of *Die Linkskurve* reflected the 'social fascism' argument prevalent in the KPD, thus rejecting collaboration with non-communist writers, but they also based this isolationist approach on the belief that the new proletarian culture had gained self-sufficiency. As Kurt Kläber argued in critiquing Döblin and other contributors to the left-liberal *Literarischen Welt*, proletarian culture around the world, and not just in Russia, 'is being projected high over the peaks of bourgeois culture'.⁴⁶

The acrimonious disputes that followed the split in the *Gruppe 1925* provide insight into the nature of the debates over aesthetics and politics in the later Weimar years. While BPRS attacks on Döblin in 1929 predated the publication of his novel *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, the book's success prompted a growing chorus of BPRS activists to denounce what they saw as his pseudo-radicalism. Klaus Neukrantz's review in *Die Linkskurve* rejected the novel's 'left-bourgeois' approach as a 'reactionary and counterrevolutionary attack on the thesis of the organised class struggle', and castigated Döblin for giving 'unvarnished expression to his openly professed enmity against the organised proletarian class struggle'.⁴⁷ Part of the antipathy to Döblin's novel stemmed from his depiction of a worker as a petit-bourgeois criminal, but his rejection of the realist and documentary approach to working-class life promoted by the BPRS in favour of modernist experimentation also grated.

Döblin responded to the attacks in a scathing article in *Das Tage-Buch* in which he mocked Becher's own earlier Expressionist prose. But he reserved his strongest language for what he saw as *Die Linkskurve's* reductive approach to literature. The journal 'is an apparatus. It produces automatically normalised critique, its judgements are serially manufactured, every child can operate the apparatus; it is a machine with safeguards against autonomous thought'.⁴⁸ The core of the problem, for Döblin, was what he saw as the laughable realism promoted by the BPRS. Döblin cited George Grosz's 1921 collection of drawings *The Face of the Ruling Class* (*Das Gesicht der herrschenden Klasse*) as an example of a work that engages with the ugly reality of everyday life, unlike the BPRS critics '[w]ho believe it is enough, when they wave a red children's flag

46 Kläber 1929, p. 28.

47 Neukrantz 1929, p. 30.

48 Döblin 1972a, p. 247.

over reality'. He thus rejected their conception of Marxism. 'To show reality as it is, to demonstrate the true needs of the masses and out of that and for that purpose create theory, that would be Marxist'.⁴⁹ The aesthetic and political differences here often shaded over into deeply personal animosity, as with Otto Biha's attack describing *Berlin Alexanderplatz* as 'the confession of a cultural nihilist, an unsteady, insecure, resigned bourgeois who has finally found the external form (his style) that matches his inner conflict'.⁵⁰

While BPRS pronouncements tended to be categorical, this belied the serious debates *within* the movement over realism and proletarian literature. The documentary style derided by Döblin was exemplified by the 'reportage' tradition associated with writers like Kisch, but the BPRS drew back from its initial championing of this approach. Between 1928 and 1932 it moved to endorse more participatory forms of worker culture. This latter approach, to which I will return in the next section, placed a much greater emphasis on *how* culture was produced as opposed to aesthetic prescriptions. For Becher, writing in January 1930, this represented a profound shift: 'a new proletarian literary form is emerging: the worker-correspondents and local party newspapers [*Zellenzeitungen*]'.⁵¹ Journalistic approaches began to inform proletarian literature more broadly, with newspaper extracts and other documentary forms incorporated into novels themselves, giving rise to hybrid forms with some affinities to avant-garde montage. Klaus Neukrantz's *Barrikaden am Wedding* or Breidel's *Maschinenfabrik N & K* exemplified this aesthetic.

In the aftermath of the Second World Congress of Revolutionary Literature in October 1930, the BPRS shifted again, turning back to a consideration of literary form. As Becher argued in 1931, proletarian literature had developed to such an extent that it was time to move on to new approaches.⁵² Worker participation was important, but much like the *AIZ* was doing with the illustrated paper, the left needed a literature that could challenge the mass commercial novels so popular among workers. Invoking the tropes of degenerate literature we saw in the previous chapter, Becher argued that communist literature should not simply mimic such commercial culture – no 'trash and filth [*Schund*

49 Döblin 1972a, p. 252.

50 Biha 1930, p. 24.

51 Becher 1930, p. 4. Becher was referring here to the spread of low-cost newspapers or newsletters based in working-class districts in major cities that were Party affiliated but produced by local Party members, and thus reflected local concerns directly.

52 Döblin had mocked the confident claims of an emerging proletarian literature, arguing that this 'secret literature' was more a product of the desires of the BPRS leaders like Becher, who sought a position as 'dictator over literature' (1972a, p. 249).

und Schmutz], painted red'⁵³ – but should formulate a literature that, 'when it seizes the masses, can become a material power and contribute an important part to transforming the world'.⁵⁴ This was precisely the ground on which the 'red-one-mark-series' had been inaugurated a year earlier,⁵⁵ and Becher's call was taken up by a host of left artists. Brecht, for example, argued in 1930 that one had to develop 'the means of pleasure into an object of instruction, and to convert certain institutions from places of entertainment into organs of mass communication'.⁵⁶

It was left to the most formidable of critics, Georg Lukács, to pose the problems of this proletarian literature more concretely, undermining the BPRS conception of realism in the process. In a review of Willi Bredel's novels in the November 1931 issue of *Die Linkskurve*, Lukács took Bredel to task for several aesthetic and political flaws in his work. Bredel's novels, he argued, generate

an artistically unresolved contradiction between the broad narrative framework of his story, which includes everything that it essentially requires, and his manner of telling it, which is partly a kind of journalistic reportage, and partly a kind of public speech... What is needed to make them come alive, i.e. living human beings, with living, changing and developing relationships between them, is as good as completely lacking.⁵⁷

While it was the 'reportage' of the novels that Lukács found most consistently objectionable, he insisted that this was not simply a question of stylistic inadequacies, but reflected a fundamental lack of a dialectical framework in Bredel's work. This reflected Lukács's emphasis in this period on the importance of art and literature rather than the revolutionary working class as the locus of de-reification, a position that we saw in the third chapter. It was thus in the movement of the literary text itself – involving a dialectical overcoming of the distinction between form and content, forward and backward movement – that Lukács looked for the evocation of the social totality. This was precisely what he found missing in Bredel's work. Such an example of 'positive' proletarian literature is false because it

53 Becher 1931, p. 6.

54 Becher 1931, p. 8.

55 Biha 1979, p. 219.

56 'The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre', in Brecht 1964, p. 42.

57 'The Novels of Willi Bredel', in Lukács 1980, pp. 24–25.

makes light of the difficulties that the development of the revolution comes up against. For these difficulties can only be portrayed in literature if our writers succeed in depicting, in a genuinely living and palpable way, the obstacles that keep good workers away from the revolutionary movement, and the currents that drive even the lower and proletarianized stratum of the petty bourgeoisie into the camp of counter-revolution – only if they show us how hard a road these sections of the masses face in attaining ideological clarification.⁵⁸

Thus, in Lukács's view, Bredel's unmediated proletarian reportage simply presents the reader with wish-images of proletarian rectitude. One can also read here a certain disquiet with the KPD's tendency to reductively write off whole social groups as reactionary, a tendency with which, as we saw in earlier chapters, writers like Paul Levi and Siegfried Kracauer sought to critically engage. The pull of fascism was strong, Lukács was suggesting, and the road to revolutionary subjectivity hard; injunctions enforcing a proper revolutionary posture underestimated the difficulties of transforming consciousness, and thus weakened the revolutionary movement.

Bredel responded by noting that proletarian literature was still in its infancy, but deferred to Lukács's stature and accepted his critique.⁵⁹ An article by Otto Gotsche a few months later returned to this exchange and offered a more robust defence of Bredel. Gotsche claimed to have spoken with workers who had read both Bredel's novels and Lukács's response. He avowed that they came down firmly on the side of the novelist and upheld the revolutionary qualities of his work. Until he could write novels himself, Gotsche suggested, Lukács had no business attacking Bredel.⁶⁰ Lukács had little time for this critique, which sidestepped his key point, responding that Gotsche's naïve reliance on the views of the masses as intrinsically correct exposed the 'residues of Luxemburgism in the German workers' movement', transposing the theory of spontaneity into the realm of literature.⁶¹ Lukács later returned to the offensive in a 1932 polemic against Ernst Ottwalt, one of the contributors to *Kuhle Wampe*. His target was once again reportage, which Lukács contended 'could

58 'The Novels of Willi Bredel' in Lukács 1980, p. 27.

59 Bredel 1932.

60 Gotsche 1932.

61 'The Novels of Willi Bredel', in Lukács 1980, p. 28. Lukács was not wrong here in the sense that the council model of political praxis was arguably taken over by writers like Brecht, but also by a range of other cultural tendencies in the late Weimar years. His attack on Luxemburg here arguably mis-understands her conception of spontaneity.

only recognize certain isolated facts, or in the best case groups of facts – never the contradictory unity-in-process of the totality – and pass moral judgements on these facts'.⁶² Again, this is an argument familiar from the debates over totality we saw in the third chapter.

Ottwalt's novel was different to those of Bredel, however, in that it drew more explicitly on modernist devices. It was thus not only Ottwalt's work at which Lukács was taking aim, but a range of other writers standing behind him, most notably Brecht. Lukács argued that Brecht's critique of the Aristotelian dramatic theatre was profoundly misplaced, with his practices of estrangement expressing a faulty understanding of historical development that reduced literary texts to their effects and their use.⁶³ Lukács linked Brecht's approach to Wilhelm Worringer's distinction between abstraction and empathy, a distinction we saw in the third chapter, and thereby condemned Brecht's work as part of a lineage that ran back through the *neue Sachlichkeit* to Expressionism.⁶⁴ Lukács's arguments reflect the tensions within his own thought, driven by his turn to art as the locus of de-reification on the one hand, and his ongoing attempts to develop a theoretically sustainable position that could support the development of international communism. His critical realism thus sought a way out of what he saw as the dangers of the Luxemburgist legacy while maintaining his vigilance against the modernist threat.

Despite his stature within the KPD, Lukács's artistic policing did not sit well with Brecht. Walter Benjamin recorded a 1934 conversation in which, referring to critics like Lukács, Brecht argued:

They are, to put it bluntly, enemies of production. Production makes them uncomfortable. You never know where you are with production; production is the unforeseeable. You never know what's going to come out. And they themselves don't want to produce. They want to play the *apparatchik* and exercise control over other people. Every one of their criticisms contains a threat.⁶⁵

Brecht's comment echoes Gotsche, intimating that Lukács was no writer. But Brecht's argument, stressing as it did the authoritarian character of Lukács's critique and the importance of indeterminacy in the artistic process, was rather more subtle. The disagreement here reflected a very different reading of

62 'Reportage or Portrayal?', in Lukács 1980, p. 48.

63 'Reportage or Portrayal?' in Lukács 1980, p. 66.

64 'Reportage or Portrayal?', in Lukács 1980, p. 70.

65 Benjamin 1973b, p. 118.

the work of art. For Brecht, the indeterminacy of the work as well as its political value stemmed from the complex and changing relationship between producers and audiences. Lukács, on the other hand, judged the work according to its internal logic, a perspective that led him to endorse only critical realism as an aesthetic adequate to the evocation of the social totality. Lukács's trenchant critiques of writers like Bredel certainly had merit, but retained an inability to engage with the crucial social dimension of literature, what he quite accurately identified as the Luxemburgist tendency. This Luxemburgist legacy, I will argue in the next two sections, was especially evident in the worker-photographer and worker-theatre movements that provided the seeds for an emancipatory culture that sought, although not explicitly, to reactivate that legacy.

6.3 'We Are the Eyes of Our Class!': Workers' Photography and Film

One of Brecht's key interlocutors and interpreters from the late Weimar period was Walter Benjamin, whose work bears strong traces of a Brechtian conception of aesthetics and politics. We can see this in a short commentary called simply 'The Newspaper' published in 1934 in which Benjamin argued that the medium had fundamentally transformed writing and, more importantly, the relationship between writer and reader. Newspaper readers possess 'the impatience of people who are excluded and who think they have the right to see their own interests expressed'.⁶⁶ Publishers and writers exploit this desire through a flood of commodified content, but leave the reader's desire for true inclusion permanently unfulfilled, a situation that, as Brecht had argued, also prevailed in radio. Nevertheless, Benjamin argues, this is a dialectical process that prepares the grounds for its own overcoming:

Literary competence is no longer founded on specialized training but is now based on polytechnical education, and thus becomes public property. It is, in a word, the literarization of the conditions of living that masters the otherwise insoluble antinomies. And it is at the scene of the limitless debasement of the word – the newspaper, in short – that its salvation is being prepared.⁶⁷

Benjamin's approach to newspapers suggests a Brechtian re-functioning that also has an affinity with Münzenberg's projects, in particular the *AIZ*. As with

66 'The Newspaper', in Benjamin 1999b, p. 741.

67 'The Newspaper', in Benjamin 1999b, p. 742.

Brecht, Benjamin directs his search for radical alternatives at the media apparatus itself, a position suggested by his broader analysis of cultural politics in the capitalist era that we saw in the third chapter. In his essay 'The Author as Producer', written in the same year as 'The Newspaper', Benjamin argues that revolutionary writing is not about content; the bourgeois cultural apparatus has proven capable of assimilating and thus neutralising the most revolutionary themes. The author – by which he means bourgeois authors like himself and the essay's intended audience – must work for the transformation of the apparatus of production. Brecht's epic theatre and his notion of 're-functioning' are crucial to Benjamin's suggestion that the bourgeois author must become a class traitor, a betrayal that 'consists in conduct that transforms him from a supplier of the productive apparatus into an engineer who sees it as his task to adapt this apparatus to the purposes of proletarian revolution'.⁶⁸

Benjamin's perspective arguably sidesteps the grounds of the debates between Becher and Döblin, Lukács and Bredel, by avoiding a reductionist rejection of the 'bourgeois' author while still placing the conditions of cultural production, distribution, and reception at the heart of his analysis. In the process, he also implicitly challenges Lukács's vision of the pristine work of art, situated outside the conditions of its production, as the locus of de-reification. Benjamin thus argues that Brechtian montage is significant precisely because it integrates aesthetics with production. John Heartfield is another artist Benjamin cites in this regard. His photomontages, which graced the covers of the *AIZ*, 'made the book cover into a political instrument'.⁶⁹ Yet, for Benjamin, montage is not enough on its own. As with any avant-garde technique, the advertising industry amply demonstrated that such aesthetic innovations could easily 'supply a productive apparatus without changing it'.⁷⁰ A more profound re-functioning is necessary that extends the basis of cultural production itself. The Soviet practice of using ordinary people as actors in films thus challenges the apparatus of the film industry, although he stresses that this too is not simply a prescriptive measure for making a 'revolutionary' art.⁷¹

For Benjamin as for Brecht, re-functioning was not simply about shifting the responsibility for editorial content, but was conceived of as a way of producing new modes of seeing, new subjectivities, and new forms of embodiment. This

68 'The Author as Producer', in Benjamin 1999b, p. 780. The piece was written as a speech to be given at the communist Institute for the Study of Fascism in Paris, although Gershom Scholem claims that the text was never in fact presented (see p. 781n1).

69 'The Author as Producer', in Benjamin 1999b, p. 775.

70 Ibid.

71 'On the Present Situation of Russian Film', in Benjamin 1999b, pp. 13–14.

perspective was taken up explicitly in the worker-photography or theatre movements that sought to abolish the divisions of labour and the hierarchies that characterised bourgeois art and commercial media. The hyphenated conceptualisation of the 'worker-photographer' (*Arbeiter-Fotograf*) suggests a hybrid subjectivity that echoes some of the avant-garde ideas like the 'photo-eye' that we saw in the last chapter, but that was rooted more deeply in the culture of the left. This new subjectivity, as I will show, nevertheless bore strong traces of the KPD's political line. The worker-photographer was one who rejected any collaboration with the 'social fascists', enacting instead a masculinising and violent rhetoric that dovetailed with the Party's street-fighting orientation. For all these limitations, though, worker-photography did broaden the scope of left cultural production and forms of mobilisation.

As I have noted, both the communist press and that of Willi Münzenberg, especially the *AIZ*, increasingly relied on worker-correspondents for content. The worker-photographer movement represented an extension of these developments. Made up of a network of clubs linked by the *Worker-Photographer* (*Arbeiter-Fotograf*, or *AF*) newspaper, founded in 1926, the goal of the movement was to create a broad-based network of worker-correspondents who could supply communist-oriented newspapers, in particular the *AIZ*, with photographic content.⁷²

As we shall see, worker-photographers enjoyed considerable success in this respect, but their work tends to be forgotten in subsequent accounts of the *AIZ*, which focus on better-known figures like John Heartfield and on the techniques of photomontage that he pioneered. Thus, Cristina Cuevas-Wolf argues, 'Münzenberg's decision to use montage as the satirical motif in the *AIZ* proved, in the end, to have assured the magazine's international success and the establishment of a transnational web of political unity in the name of Soviet socialism and antifascism in the early 1930s'.⁷³ Heartfield's work was especially prominent in this respect, with his influence peaking in the crisis year of 1932. The success of the *AIZ* in this period made photomontage a key form of political expression, with even the Nazi press taking up this aesthetic in their publications. As Sabine Kriebel notes, the Nazi *Illustrated Observer* (*Illustrierter Beobachter*) and the *AIZ* together ensured that 'photomontage emerged front and centre as *the* pictorial means of mass agitation just at the moment of capitalism's crisis and democracy's demise'.⁷⁴ Beyond the directly

72 Hesse 2009.

73 Cuevas-Wolf 2009, p. 187.

74 Kriebel 2008, p. 106. As Kriebel notes, this Nazi flirtation with photomontage was short-lived, with nationalist kitsch dominating again after 1933.

political, the commercial press also made significant use of photomontage, in particular in advertising.

The foregrounding of Heartfield and photomontage in accounts of the *AIZ* highlights an important moment in which avant-garde practices were mobilised for a revolutionary politics, but this perspective also tends to obscure the fact that many of the images in the paper came from worker-photographers, and that in general they reflected more of a documentary realist aesthetic. Indeed, the use of montage remained highly controversial within the worker-photographer movement, as was evident in debates in the *AF* magazine. There, the leaders of the movement sought to develop the two attributes they saw as necessary for any worker-photographer: technical ability and the correct political consciousness. In its early issues, the focus was especially on the former, which featured extensive discussions of basic issues of camera functioning, lighting, or composition. The relative novelty of portable cameras cheap enough to be accessible to workers necessitated this instruction, but right from the beginning the stress on photographic technique was closely linked with political orientation. This was perhaps most evident in the 'image critiques' that were included in many issues. These provided lessons in reading photographs that were designed to show how meaning was socially and technically produced. Photographs from the bourgeois and working-class press were reproduced, and readers were taken through a critical analysis of their technical and political implications. For example, an image from a commercial British paper depicting women and children affected by a coal-miners' strike was used to illustrate how the meaning of an image could be shaped through captions. The British editors had captioned the image with the reassuring claim that the bosses would not let these women and children starve. The accompanying analysis in the *AF* demonstrated how this image, while potentially displaying a political identification with the plight of the strikers, was thereby stripped of critical import and reframed as reactionary propaganda.⁷⁵

The development of media literacy fed into the broader focus on workers as *producers* of images. As the editorial of the inaugural issue of the *AF* stressed, the bourgeoisie had long used photography in the class struggle, making it imperative that the working-class movement do the same. Workers thus needed to go beyond personal snapshots and an individualistic use of photography in order to produce a proletarian alternative.⁷⁶ Edwin Hoernle, a key contributor to the paper in the early 1930s, argued that images were especially important in the formation of class consciousness because the workers' press

75 Globig 1926.

76 Der Arbeiter-Fotograf 1926a.

needed to combat the huge influence of the commercial media. Hoernle was a long-time KPD activist and, since 1924, a Reichstag deputy who was one of the party's foremost proponents of radical pedagogy.⁷⁷ Already in 1919 he had argued that communist schools should be modelled on the workers' councils,⁷⁸ a perspective that led him to the Luxemburgist conclusion in 1923 that '[t]he true school for communists is everyday revolutionary praxis!'⁷⁹ Drawing on this experience in children's education, he argued in concert with many other contributors to the *AF* that photographs provided the potential for a condensed form of critical understanding.⁸⁰ Here again we can see Luxemburgist influences at play, a translation of the council ideals into the cultural sphere that, while not explicitly expressed as such, was arguably at odds with KPD policy.

The primary goal of the *AF* and the *AIZ* was thus to challenge the illustrated newspapers and magazines that, as we saw in the last chapter, also attracted the critique of Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer. At the same time, the worker-photographer movement rejected the privatised snapshots of family life so characteristic of bourgeois photography. As the *AIZ* editor Franz Höllering argued, '[workers'] photographs must therefore be weapons and not more or less aesthetic ideals of private life'.⁸¹ The *AF* therefore simultaneously challenged both of the dominant bourgeois photographic forms, the public/commercial, and the private/familial. As Hoernle and others argued, this required a transformation of vision, a new embodied proletarian consciousness and subjectivity. Unlike László Moholy-Nagy or Franz Roh who argued, as we saw in the previous chapter, that these new media produced a new transformed subjectivity transcending class, Hoernle stressed that vision itself was class specific. Thus, the *AF* was engaged in a pedagogical project: '[w]e teach our class brothers how to use their eyes'. Worker-photographers are thus a cultural vanguard in the class struggle. They 'are the eyes of our class!'⁸² (Ill. 28)

The hybrid subject produced through these new forms of vision was far more active than that implied by the 'photo-eye' of the avant-garde photographers, although it also shared a conception of technology as ideologically neutral with Moholy-Nagy, Roh, and others we saw in the last chapter. Höllering, for example, argued that cameras were politically neutral, usable for either 'the

77 Hering 2003.

78 Grams 2012, p. 5.

79 Hoernle 1923, p. 57.

80 Hoernle 1930b.

81 Höllering 1928a, p. 3.

82 Hoernle 1930a, p. 154.



ILLUSTRATION 28

Front cover, *Der Arbeiter-Fotograf*, July 1930, 4, 7. The article title reads: 'The Eye of the Worker'. Digital Image.

© BPK/STAATSBIBLIOTHEK ZU BERLIN, ABTEILUNG HISTORISCHE DRUCKE.

freeing or the oppression of humanity'.⁸³ The goal of the worker-photographer movement lay in 'the conquest of the observing machines... The observing machine that cannot fall prey to any illusion was the goal in this field, and today we can declare that it has been reached'.⁸⁴ In many of the descriptions, then, the worker-photographer becomes an ever-vigilant observing machine: '[o]ne has to be present. Like the worker-photographers... My camera was always ready to shoot. 150th of a second, aperture 4.5, focused at 7 meters'.⁸⁵ The documentary stance so central to ideas of worker culture was thus embodied in this new hybrid figure.

Perhaps most tellingly, the cameras of these proletarian observing machines were consistently depicted as weapons, a theme that Höllering invoked in his

83 Höllering 1928b, p. 4.

84 Höllering 1928b, p. 3.

85 *Der Arbeiter-Fotograf* 1929, p. 107.

comment above and that was repeated in almost every issue.⁸⁶ Referring to his camera, one writer argued, '[w]e're helping with that [the class struggle] with our cannons'.⁸⁷ In part this violent imagery was a response to the growing police and right-wing violence that, as we shall see later in the chapter, shaped the political culture of the left in the later Weimar years. Thus, photography was conceived of as a mechanism for 'policing the police' (Ill. 29, 30) and challenging their collusion with the radical right in the streets. Already in 1927 an article and photo-spread had described the police trying to prevent worker-photographers from documenting a march by the *Stahlhelm* (Steel Helmets), the most prominent right-wing paramilitary organisation; this was but a foretaste of the often violent collusions between the police and the radical right in subsequent years, especially as the Nazi SA rose to prominence.⁸⁸ The *AF*'s advice in this respect was often very practical, for example offering tips on the legal issues around the photographing of police action at demonstrations.⁸⁹

The violent imagery of the camera as a weapon was by no means exclusive to the left. As we saw in previous chapters, this was a prominent theme in colonial, militarist, and policing visual cultures as well, not to mention less directly in various uses of photography in combatting 'degeneracy' through social or racial hygiene and eugenics. The worker-photographer movement thus drew uncritically on this broad culture, a perspective that was not surprising given the increasingly militarised and masculinist terms of KPD organising under the social fascism approach. Nevertheless, this wasn't the only perspective on offer in the *AF*. One article stressed that in photographing left actions, workers should look to capture the majesty of large crowds as a way of demonstrating working-class strength.⁹⁰ This collective subject was a prominent theme in left culture, offering an alternative to the figure of the individualised heroic-male worker favoured in communist representations of the time.⁹¹

The debates over the 'correct' posture of the worker-photographer were tied directly to the aesthetic debates that emerged around photomontage. Here we can see the extent to which histories presenting photomontage as the dominant aesthetic of the *AIZ* can be misleading. In one notable case, Hans

86 Typical article titles included 'The Photograph – A Weapon in the Class Struggle' (Leupold 1931) or, for an article on Heartfield in the *AIZ*, 'Use Photos as a Weapon!' (Weiskopf 1929).

87 Pfeiffer 1929, p. 49.

88 *Der Arbeiter-Fotograf* 1927b.

89 *Der Arbeiter-Fotograf* 1926b.

90 *Der Arbeiter-Fotograf* 1927a.

91 On this representation of the worker, see Sewell 2011; Petro 1989, pp. 110–39.



ILLUSTRATION 29

Front cover, Der Arbeiter-Fotograf, August 1929, 3, 8. The article title reads: 'Police these Police'. Digital Image.

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ILLUSTRATION 30

Front cover, Der Arbeiter-Fotograf, June 1929, 3, 6. The article title reads: 'With the Camera between the Night Stick and the Carbine'. Digital Image.

© BPK/STAATSBIBLIOTHEK ZU BERLIN, ABTEILUNG HISTORISCHE DRUCKE.

Woile, a worker-correspondent who also founded the 'Red Reporter' agitprop theatre troupe in Bremen,⁹² wrote to the AIZ in 1930 praising Heartfield and arguing that 'a photomontage gives us readers a clearer image of the latest topics than is possible within a lengthy article'.⁹³ While the AIZ and AF did not dispute the power of Heartfield's works, they rejected the attempts by Woile and others to experiment with photomontage themselves. In fact, articles warned frequently of the dangers of the 'artistic' or 'aestheticising' tendencies of montage.⁹⁴ 'Simple, clear, beautiful photographs of your world – that is your goal', argued Höllering in a discussion of photomontage. 'No dilettantish

92 Grape 1983, p. 56.

93 Woile 1981, p. 183.

94 See Hoernle 1931 for a key statement of this view.



ILLUSTRATION 31

Front cover, *Der Arbeiter-Fotograf*, April 1928, 2, 8. Digital Image

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BERLIN, ABTEILUNG HISTORISCHE DRUCKE.

artiness' (Ill. 31).⁹⁵ The prominent critic Alfréd Kemény, whose manifestos were covered in the previous chapter, acknowledged that photomontage had its virtues when done by the right artist. But, writing under the name Durus, he stressed that 'worker-photographers are in the meantime warned against similar experiments; because with them a consequence of similar experiments would be a fleeting playful aestheticism; a distraction from the revolutionary class struggle and from the true task of the worker-photographer as a revolutionary reporter'.⁹⁶

These dangers of aestheticism or playfulness were depicted in profoundly gendered terms, shoring up the image of the masculine worker-photographer in which the *AF* had such a strong investment. This can be seen in Durus's review of a photomontage exhibition that stressed the apolitical nature of much of the work, singling out especially 'the erotic nullities of the former Dadaist Hannah Höch'.⁹⁷ For Durus, artistic frivolity represented a distinctly

⁹⁵ Höllering 1928d p. 4.

⁹⁶ Durus 1931b, p. 168.

⁹⁷ Durus 1931a, p. 136.

feminising threat that quickly descended into caricature. Thus, Höllering juxtaposed a proletarian matter-of-factness to the queer artistic dilettante who 'wears his floppy hat on his little head and knots a big, flowing necktie in front of his Adam's apple'.⁹⁸ The true proletarian photographer, Höllering implied, must reject such aestheticism in favour of a masculine directness; much as the situation had changed by the late 1920s, the same rhetoric used against Expressionists and other artist-revolutionaries in the early Weimar period returned here, now directed at 'deviant' workers themselves.

Such arguments also betrayed an acceptance of social hygienic ideas that saw workers as particularly vulnerable to being led astray, and thus in need of guidance. What was good for Heartfield and other acknowledged artists, in other words, was dangerous for worker-photographers. Only a documentary realist aesthetic developed with a masculine rectitude would serve to express and embody a working-class subject position. It was no surprise then that Höch's politicisation of the gendered and racialised implications of mass culture was out of bounds. Rather, as Höllering put it, '[t]he proletarian tendency: forward, forward into a just and great future for humanity, is the motor driving the worker-photographer'.⁹⁹

It was not only working-class photographers that were in danger of mis-using photomontage. Many of the avant-garde artists that we encountered in the last chapter were targets of *AF* critics. Despite their previous collaboration, Durus rejected Moholy-Nagy's photomontage and photograms. Only Heartfield and a few others – notably Alice Lex-Nerlinger and her work decrying the criminalisation of abortion – escaped condemnation.¹⁰⁰ Walter Nettelbeck, another *AF* critic, contrasted artistic 'sense and nonsense' in a particularly vitriolic article denouncing the bourgeois aestheticism of artists like Moholy-Nagy or Ruttmann.¹⁰¹ While the leadership of the *AF* repeatedly stressed these arguments, though, they did not go entirely unanswered. In the case of Nettelbeck's article, the editors invited responses, one of which came from the prominent artist and photographer Hans Windisch, who was among the targets of Nettelbeck's wrath. Windisch, whose work was praised by Moholy-Nagy, defended artistic experimentation on the grounds that montage was inherently politically radical. He also rejected the *AF*'s insistence on understanding photography as an 'objective' medium. 'Neither the eye nor the

98 Höllering 1928e, p. 3.

99 Höllering 1928e, p. 4.

100 Durus 1931b, p. 167.

101 Nettelbeck 1929.

camera is objective, so do not play them off against each other. Both, however, can supplement an image of the world'.¹⁰²

Given the *AF*'s general rejection of photomontage in favour of a documentary realism, Heartfield's prominence was thus surprising and in many respects exceptional rather than typical. In his case, his work was seen as fitting the mould of the artistic weapon in the class struggle, escaping in the process mere aestheticisation. As Adolf Behne put it in the communist satirical newspaper *Eulenspiegel* in 1931, 'Heartfield's photomontage: it is photography plus dynamite'.¹⁰³ For Höllering, the power of Heartfield's work came from his mastery and control: 'through an understanding of the meaning and movement of his time, the proletarian artist Heartfield had made the modern technological medium of photography subservient to his artistic will'.¹⁰⁴ This powerful and implicitly masculine *will* was the marker of his artistic genius, but again it was one that workers dare not imitate.

One can give the worker-photographers only one piece of advice: stay away from this, do not be distracted from your great task of photographing reality, do not let yourself be seduced into playing the game in which a false, hypocritical and pompous so-called artistry is foisted on you as being of great importance. You are a worker. Be proud of it. You have nothing to do with the newest fashions in bourgeois pastimes. A camera makes sense in your hands only if you use it as a weapon.¹⁰⁵

Höllering's argument here highlights the extent to which worker-photography was conceived of as a form of self-disciplining, a cultural form that enabled the creation of a properly proletarian subjectivity. There was a clear hierarchy in which workers needed to maintain an asceticism that only a few artists like Heartfield could break. In this sense, Höllering argued, Heartfield's positive example was not in his aesthetic but in his *will*. The vigilance of the worker-photographer likewise involved a bodily discipline, in this case a performance of a rigorous realist aesthetic that was threatened by the erotic, the playful, the personal, and the useless. The stress on the seductive, feminising dangers of these values involved a repressive orientation to the body, a proletarian asceticism opposed to any supposed emancipatory potential of the

102 Windisch 1929, p. 247.

103 Behne 1981, p. 186.

104 Höllering 1928d, p. 3.

105 Höllering 1928d, p. 4.

erotic or of pleasure. Thus, while some avant-garde techniques were welcome when implemented by Heartfield, the real danger lay in the perspectives of the avant-garde artists I traced in the third and fourth chapters who found a powerful emancipatory charge in such erotic, playful, and pleasurable moments. Symptomatic of this repressive tendency was the fact that in the *AIZ* and much of the communist press the heroic-male worker was most often twinned with images of women and children as passive victims. This gendered dichotomisation of subject and object of the gaze thus reflected the specific dynamic of communist organising in the late Weimar years, but also a broader tendency to posit a hard masculine subjectivity and body as bulwark against the fragmenting cultural logic of capitalist modernity.

The extent to which worker-photographers resisted these injunctions and used photomontage or sought to produce social and political critiques beyond the parameters laid out in the *AF* is difficult to determine, although the frequency of the exhortations to aesthetic and political rectitude suggests that it was not uncommon. The contradictions that we have seen running through a variety of examples of cultural radicalism in the Weimar period emerged here again, reflecting a persistent suspicion on the part of the KPD and many others on the left of a kind of excessive embodiment and of the logic of the carnivalesque that was sustained by the avant-garde. At the same time, however, the worker-photography movement and the *AIZ* did take the role of pleasure and leisure in workers' lives seriously in that they sought to produce a popular culture to rival that of the culture industry. This marked an important shift in the cultural politics of the left, even while its emergence was often severely restrained by the attempt to sustain a proletarian discipline and rectitude. This policing was especially prevalent in relation to large-scale media institutions like the *AIZ*. In other, smaller-scale forms of worker culture, such as the worker-theatre from which Brecht drew inspiration, there was arguably more room for experimentation. In that theatre as well, as had been the case in Munich in 1918–19, cultural experimentation returned to the streets. In line with the principles of worker-driven culture, though, these experiments involved new forms of social and cultural mobilisation responding to the increasingly dark and difficult times.

6.4 Proletarian Theatre and the Fight for the Streets

In September 1920, in the aftermath of the suppression of revolutionary movements by the SPD-led government, the Social Democratic President Friedrich Ebert paid a visit to the set where Ufa's *Deception (Anna Boleyn)* – one of a

number of lavish historical spectacles produced in the early Weimar years – was being filmed. The scene was a coronation procession in front of Westminster Abbey, filmed with 4,000 unemployed workers as extras. Paul Eipper witnessed what followed:

The coronation procession had just reached the church portals for the first time when the President and his entourage arrived. It must be said to his credit that he and his companions took their places very modestly on the hill beside Ufa's general staff and, like any other spectators, looked on with interest. But the unemployed workers forgot they were supposed to be English citizens in the time of Henry VIII and remembered instead the misery of their everyday lives. Groups formed and whispered among themselves, and Lubitsch [the director] bellowed more than usual. The assistant directors grew red in the face and yanked on the horses' reins, making the animals nervous, but all to no avail: As the procession returned and the crowd was supposed to pour through the city gates, driven along by King Henry's mounted guard, a chain of people formed in front of the gate, shouted 'Down with Ebert!' and wouldn't let anyone behind them get through. . . . The four thousand people clumped together, and the shooting had to stop for the day.¹⁰⁶

This anecdote, which returns us to the early Weimar years, offers an interesting entry point into the politics of mass commercial culture. In September 1920 the major post-War revolutionary wave was gradually beginning to ebb; the recent upsurge in radical action in response to the Kapp-Lüttwitz putsch had been suppressed only a few months earlier. However, the spontaneous response to the presence of Ebert suggested that discontent with the economic situation and with the SPD government's role in it continued to bubble close to the surface. There was also an extra layer of irony to the protest given that the scene being shot depicted a spontaneous rebellion by Henry VIII's subjects against what they saw as the illegitimate coronation of Anne Boleyn. The reaction of the extras thus broke the spell of the filmic illusion being created, if only for the day. Ernst Lubitsch's grand-historical dramas were among those that Kracauer later indicted because they 'instinctively sabotaged any understanding of historic processes'.¹⁰⁷ What this episode suggests is that, at least among these worker-extras, there was a significant understanding of the historical

106 Quoted in Kreimeier 1996, p. 59.

107 Kracauer 1947, p. 52.

process from which films like *Deception* (a telling title in this respect) served to divert attention.

This rebellion was emblematic in one final respect. I have been arguing that as the revolutionary energies of the early Weimar period were being gradually and often violently suppressed, they began to re-emerge in the cultural sphere. Already in 1920, when these workers were forced to take on low-paid labour as extras to make ends meet, this shift had begun, with left cultural activism beginning to look for alternatives to bourgeois and commercial culture. By the later Weimar years, worker-theatre and agitprop movements sought to develop a more systematic alternative that could reclaim the power over cultural production from which the extras were alienated. With action in the political sphere increasingly constrained, these movements sought to reignite the broader revolutionary movement through theatrical production.¹⁰⁸ In this respect, as with the worker-photography movement, we can see theatre and agitprop as attempts to produce alternative spectacles to those of the culture industry, but also as efforts to transcend bourgeois distinctions between culture and politics, stage and audience.

Theatre had long been a privileged site of left cultural activism, with Paul Lenzner in 1928 articulating a common socialist view of theatre as 'in every era...[the] most important medium for mass education [*Massenbildungsmittel*]'.¹⁰⁹ The worker-theatre and agitprop movements became especially prominent in the later Weimar years, but they emerged out of a long history of socialist theatre and spectacle that pre-dated 1914. The SPD-affiliated Free People's Theatre (*Freie Volksbühne*) had been founded in Berlin in 1890. In a period when the Party was underground, their activity rendered illegal under Bismarck's anti-socialist laws, the theatre provided space in the cultural sphere for political debate and mobilisation. While somewhat similar to the proletarian theatre of the late Weimar years in this respect, the early *Freie Volksbühne* sought to improve the cultural level of the working class through the reclamation of bourgeois culture rather than generate a participatory theatrical practice. Thus, Naturalist plays by Ibsen, Zola, Tolstoy, and others were the most common productions, and experiments with more radical forms of theatre were discouraged.¹¹⁰ This model was taken up after the War, with the Association of German People's Theatre Clubs (*Verband der deutschen*

108 Brady 1982.

109 Quoted in Hornauer 1985, p. 15.

110 Rüden 1973, pp. 211–17.

Volksbühnenvereine), founded in 1920, encompassing 190,000 members; by 1930 there were 305 *Volksbühne* clubs with over half a million members.¹¹¹

The *Volksbühne* were part of the broader 'parallel culture' movement associated with the SPD that sought socialist alternatives to bourgeois culture. After 1918 many branches of this movement split, with communist and socialist versions competing for workers' allegiances. They were part of a broader set of organisations developing left cultural life that, as I have indicated, included the Life Reform movement, clubs and troupes devoted to dance, song, spoken word, gymnastics, sport, and a range of other activities.¹¹² Increasingly emphasising worker participation, many of these organisations performed at working-class festivals and public events throughout the Weimar period.¹¹³ Frequently these events marked important dates on the calendar of the left, ranging from more explicitly political events like May Day or the commemoration of the murder of Luxemburg and Liebknecht to less politicised celebrations of summer or youth culture. These events were often claimed (and contested) by both the SPD and the KPD, although some, Constitution Day most prominent among them, were primarily of importance to the SPD. The celebration of Constitution Day included mass festivals that sought to engage the population as a whole, an integrative spectacle that achieved some notable success in promoting a sense of republican unity.¹¹⁴ The left's growing awareness of the importance of cultural politics for the mobilisation of workers was the impetus behind these events. Frankfurt's SPD Party secretary was one of many in the period who stressed that cultural events and festivals were more likely to attract workers than political meetings, leading the city organisation to establish a 'cultural cartel' in 1925, one of many across the country.¹¹⁵

The *Massenspiele*, a series of large-scale mass theatrical spectacles put on at trade union festivals in Leipzig between 1920 and 1924, were perhaps the most notable of the mass events. They generally combined theatre with song, dance, and other cultural forms, and involved huge casts and even bigger audiences; the 1920 festival included more than 900 performers and an audience

111 Davies 2000; Lilje 1992; Patterson 1981, pp. 24–28; Willett 1988, pp. 19–24.

112 On the history of the 'parallel culture', see Frohn 1997; Guttsman 1990, Hornauer 1985; Klenke and Walter 1992; Wunderer 1980.

113 Warstat 2005.

114 Achilles 2005, pp. 233–301; Rossol 2010, pp. 58–79; Swett 2004, pp. 148–60.

115 'Betrachtung des Sekretärs der Frankfurter SPD, Conrad Broßwitz über die Notwendigkeit der Gründung einer einheitlichen proletarischen Kulturorganisation, 4. November 1924', in Verein für Frankfurter Arbeitergeschichte 1997, pp. 1197–199.

of up to 50,000.¹¹⁶ Ernst Toller produced some of the most prominent of these *Massenspiele*. As we saw in the third chapter, Toller had read parts of his play *Transformation* to striking workers during the War, a tradition Rudolf Leonard continued in 1919 when he staged the play for striking metalworkers in Berlin.¹¹⁷ Toller's *Massenspiele*, performed from 1922–24, represented a dramatic shift in scale from these earlier readings. They also signalled an attempt on his part to move from an individual notion of transformation to what the SPD paper the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* – writing of his first *Massenspiele* depicting scenes from the French Revolution – described as an evocation of the 'passionate élan of the masses, the role that the people played in this great movement'.¹¹⁸

These large-scale festivals tended to be dominated by the SPD and the trade unions, but were part of a broader set of cultural developments in the period that promoted participation as central to cultural and political mobilisation. We can see examples across the political spectrum, ranging from Nazi spectacles through to the emancipatory productions of the revolutionary left on which I will focus here. It is important to note, though, that the desire for a participatory cultural movement was not inherently progressive. Even on the left approaches varied considerably. For the SPD, as the preamble to the closing mass concert of their 1931 'Festival of the Red Song' makes clear, an integrated culture was the goal:

We, all united,
not divided listener from singer
not divided player from viewer.
All united are we. Comrades,
celebrating a festival together.
A fest of joy.¹¹⁹

116 'Die Aufführung des Spartakus-Aufstandes', in Hoffmann and Hoffmann-Ostwald 1977, 1, p. 87.

117 Rudolf Leonard, 'Erklärung', in Fähnders and Rector 1971, pp. 168–170. See also Weber 1976, pp. 62–65.

118 H.B. 'Das Festspiel auf dem Gewerkschaftsfest', in Hoffmann and Hoffmann-Ostwald 1977, 1, p. 91.

119 Quoted in Bodek 1997, p. 52. Similarly, in a report on Frankfurt's cultural cartel in 1931, the SPD's newspaper *People's Voice* (*Volksstimme*) proclaimed that their concert productions 'no longer knew a division between listener and concert performer' ('Bericht der "Volksstimme" über eine Kundgebung des Kulturkartells, betreffend die Tätigkeit unter den Bedingungen der Wirtschaftskrise, 1. November 1931', in Verein für Frankfurter Arbeitergeschichte 1997, p. 1350).

Here we see the desire for the transcendence of social divisions in the mass event, with the abolition of the audience/performer distinction serving as the catalyst for a broader social unity. But, the 'Festival of the Red Song' was marked by a rather eclectic and passive political orientation, combining nostalgic references to Luxemburg and other revolutionary heroes with apolitical works from composers like Handel. In celebrating the republican order, events like these served to consolidate party identity and republican social order rather than seeking to promote further change.

In these SPD events, then, we often see a kind of nostalgic-leftist kitsch that obscured contradictions in the social order, but in other cases a revolutionary cultural praxis began to emerge that offered profoundly emancipatory possibilities. These were the possibilities I identified in the introduction to the book through a discussion of Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of carnival, which opened what he called a 'gay loophole' onto a world upside down. What is striking in his account is that it invokes a similar transcendence of the division between audience and spectacle:

In fact, carnival does not know footlights, in the sense that it does not acknowledge any distinction between actors and spectators. Footlights would destroy a carnival, as the absence of footlights would destroy a theatrical performance. Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people. While carnival lasts, there is no other life outside it. During carnival time life is subject only to its laws, that is, the laws of its own freedom. It has a universal spirit; it is a special condition of the entire world, of the world's revival and renewal, in which all take part. Such is the essence of carnival, vividly felt by all its participants.¹²⁰

As I noted in the introduction, Bakhtin's conception of carnival emerged out of the European cultural landscape of the 1920s and 30s, and he explicitly argued that figures like Brecht were engaged in a recuperation of some of the energies of medieval carnival, including through their embodied aesthetics. Bakhtin contended that the carnivalesque abolition of the divide between audience and spectacle in the Middle Ages had sought to challenge religious and political authority through the grotesque. Carnival's revolutionary moment came in its integrated performance through which the bodily discipline and repression required by official cultures was disrupted and overturned.

120 Bakhtin 1984, p. 7.

This radical moment was evident, I will argue, in various forms of left culture in the later Weimar years, but its influence was intermittent. Official worker culture, including KPD celebrations, all too often suppressed this emancipatory dimension of the participatory performance. Matthias Warstat makes this argument for many of the left's mass festivals, both socialist and communist. He contends that they involved the production and reproduction of bodily discipline in ways that often reflected gendered notions of masculine control, quasi-military organisation, and social hygiene.¹²¹ As we saw with the worker-photographer movement, this disciplinary tendency ran through much of the radical culture of the period. But, there were significant exceptions, with the influence of the avant-garde serving as one important source for an alternative aesthetics. While many of the mass spectacles of the left stressed discipline and order, the grotesque bodies of Dada and other avant-garde movements echoed more strongly the subversion of bodily norms invoked in Bakhtin's reading of carnival. For Wieland Herzfelde, as noted in his introduction to the First Dada Fair in 1920, this meant striving for a radical egalitarianism through the abolition of art as a separate sphere.

[T]he unequal distribution of opportunities for living and developing has produced in the realm of art, as in all other spheres, scandalous circumstances: On the one side a clique of so-called experts and talents that, in part through decades of training, in part through patronage and doggedness, in part through inherited specialized abilities, has monopolized all matters of valuation in art; while on the other side, the mass of human beings with their modest and naive need to represent, communicate, and constructively transform the idea within themselves and the goings-on in the world around them, has been suppressed by the clique of trendsetters. . . . The Dadaists, by contrast, are saying that making pictures is not important, but that when it happens at least no position of power should thereby be established.¹²²

This desire for the abolition of the reified divisions characteristic of bourgeois conceptions of art and culture echoed on in the debates over proletarian culture. For the communist writer Klaus Neukrantz, the integration of different cultural forms, including spoken word, choral groups, dance, and orchestra, signalled a radical version of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the total work of art

121 Warstat 2005, pp. 155–63.

122 Herzfelde 2003, p. 101.

invoked by Wagner and others in the previous century.¹²³ However, Dadaist performances, if we recall the discussions in the third chapter, refused the affirmation implicit in this approach, mimicking social order in order to *negate* it. Brecht's theatrical innovations went beyond simple negation, but similarly refused the affirmative stance of so much socialist and communist culture. His point was that '[t]he theatre as we know it shows the structure of society (represented on the stage) as incapable of being influenced by society (in the auditorium)'.¹²⁴ The goal of epic theatre was not to abolish those distinctions in the performance, but rather to render them strange or alien, and thereby make them available for radical transformation.

That KPD spectacles were less orchestrated and controlled than those of the SPD arguably had much to do with the fact that they lacked the resources to match the scale of SPD productions, but many communists were also critical of the politics of such celebratory festivals.¹²⁵ Street protest was more central to the KPD's political approach, an influence evident in the type of theatre fostered most strongly by the KPD. The worker-theatre and agitprop movements, like worker-photography, produced a very different kind of integration of the audience into the spectacle, one modelled explicitly in many cases on direct action forms of politics. In many respects, the worker-theatre movement took these developments beyond the scope of the Party, representing a 'spontaneous' cultural form that reflected the way in which Luxemburg used the term – it emerged out of a complex interplay between leading figures on the cultural left and the autonomous development of workers' own theatrical innovations. The key early instigator of many of these developments was Erwin Piscator.

Piscator's 'Proletarian Theatre' was founded in 1920, providing inspiration for many of the proletarian cultural movements I have touched on here. As I mentioned in the second chapter, Piscator had experimented with radical theatre while serving at the front during the War. This led to his political and artistic radicalisation: joining the Spartacus League and developing interests in Dada.¹²⁶ He conceived of the Proletarian Theatre as an agent of the class struggle. 'Revolutionary art', he argued in 1920, 'can only come out of the spirit of the revolutionary workforce'.¹²⁷ He thus opposed both bourgeois notions of creative individualism and a straightforwardly vanguardist role for left intel-

123 Klaus Neukrantz, 'Über die proletarische Bühne', in Hoffman and Hoffmann-Ostwald 1977, I, p. 161. Neukrantz was writing about an IAH production being staged in Berlin.

124 'A Short Organum for the Theatre', in Brecht 1964, p. 189.

125 Klenke and Walter 1992, pp. 197–208.

126 See his discussion in Piscator 1978, pp. 22–25.

127 'Über Grundlagen und Aufgaben des proletarischen Theaters', in Piscator 1968, II p. 11.

lectuals and artists, arguing that the author was ‘the point of crystallisation for the proletarian cultural will, the spark [*Zündstein*] for the workers’ yearning for knowledge.’¹²⁸ Piscator was swimming against the tide in the KPD on this point, with the KPD’s influential cultural critic Gertrud Alexander writing in *Rote Fahne* that his approach was neither artistic (as the term ‘theatre’ would suggest) nor proletarian, but, in a familiar refrain, a symptom of bourgeois radicalism.¹²⁹

The Proletarian Theatre featured short, didactic sketches often performed by amateur actors, usually workers. These sketches engaged directly with spectators, with actors sometimes emerging out of the audience before moving on stage. The singing of the ‘Internationale’ by both actors and audience became something of a Piscator trademark, reinserted spontaneously by audiences when left out of productions. As was often the case with political theatre, the staging was crude and came to include photographs, film, and other media, laying bare the construction of the theatrical spectacle for the audience.¹³⁰ This approach in turn influenced Brecht’s notion of epic theatre. As Fredric Jameson suggests, the provisional nature of the staging and acting in Brecht’s plays served as ‘an “experimental” attempt to ward off reification’, including the reified separations of audience and spectacle as well as the sphere of art itself.¹³¹ The goal of Piscator’s and Brecht’s theatre was not simply to offer an alternative aesthetic, but to enable audiences to translate this critical stance out of the theatre and into everyday life.

We might say that Alexander’s analysis of Proletarian Theatre was correct in one sense, namely in arguing that it was not ‘art’. While the KPD continued to hold on to notions of a bourgeois artistic heritage – evident even in the allowances to experiment granted to artists like Heartfield – Piscator’s theatre set out to challenge the notion of art as a separate sphere. Over time, KPD critics began to take a much kinder view of Piscator and other forms of worker-theatre, although in 1929 a critic could still demand in an article entitled ‘What We Expect from Piscator’ that theatre fulfil its classic role as a ‘mirror’ in which the true face of bourgeois society could be seen.¹³² Piscator’s challenge to representational and didactic theatre was perhaps even more evident in the projects he developed after the Proletarian Theatre. By the time of the elections of 7 December 1924, the KPD had asked Piscator to produce agitprop

128 ‘Über Grundlagen und Aufgaben des proletarischen Theaters’, in Piscator 1968, II, p. 12.

129 Gertrud Alexander, ‘Proletarisches Theater’, in Fähnders and Rector 1971, pp. 196–99.

130 Piscator 1978, pp. 37–54; Tode 2004.

131 Jameson 1998, p. 12.

132 Hartmann 1929, p. 215.

interventions to boost its standing. The result was the *Revue Roter Rummel* (Red Riot [or Revel] Review, or RRR). The name referenced the *Rummelplätze*, commercial amusement parks or carnivals directed especially at working-class youth.¹³³ These were generally condemned as reactionary forms of empty entertainment by the left, but in taking up the name Piscator signalled that he took the pull of entertainment and pleasure in working-class life more seriously. The RRR was thus propaganda, but propaganda as entertainment. Humour was key, with sketches including a satirical piece on the 'elastic eight hour day', a reference to the gradual undermining of one of the key gains of the post-War revolutions, and a boxing match between Marx and the right-wing SPD leader Gustav Noske.¹³⁴

The desire to take mass and popular culture seriously was crucial to a range of approaches that we have looked at, from the cultural theory of Walter Benjamin or Siegfried Kracauer to the *AIZ* or other media produced under the Münzenberg umbrella. In reviewing the RRR, the *Rote Fahne* noted the proletarian character of the audience, the large proportion of women and children, and the fact that 'the enthusiasm was universal'.¹³⁵ The RRR was thus one of the cultural productions that forced the KPD into a limited recognition of the importance of challenging mass commercial culture on its own ground, although as usual the impetus behind these forms of radical culture came largely from outside the Party. This shift was accompanied by a growing sense that older forms of socialist theatre like the *Freie Volksbühne* were becoming obsolete. By the late 1920s, as a commentary in the communist-oriented cultural journal *Die Front* argued, the idea of a unified *Volk* implied in that project was no longer tenable. 'In a state that is disintegrating into classes, no so-called *Volksgemeinschaft* can be produced in the theatre'.¹³⁶

The question that continually hovered over Piscator's theatre was similar to that faced by others who sought to integrate avant-garde and proletarian approaches. While the *Rote Fahne* did note the proletarian audience for the RRR, Piscator was not alone in finding his greatest success with bourgeois audiences. Cultivating bourgeois audiences was perhaps necessary in order

133 Piscator 1978, pp. 78–84; Bodek 1996, p. 60; Jelavich 1993, pp. 211–12.

134 'RRR. Von einem Arbeiter', in Hoffmann and Hoffmann-Ostwald 1977, 1, pp. 157–58 (originally in *Die Rote Fahne*).

135 'Rote Revue. Politisch-satirische Abende der KPD', in Hoffmann and Hoffmann-Ostwald 1977, 1, p. 159.

136 *Die Front* 1929, p. 149. The article does argue that Piscator's production of Büchner's *Danton's Death* marked an exception to the petit-bourgeois and bourgeois theatre the *Volksbühne* generally staged.

to make the theatre financially viable, but for some, including the anarcho-socialist writer and playwright Erich Mühsam, writing in 1927, this meant that 'the Piscator Theatre is no proletarian theatre'.¹³⁷ Piscator was of course of a different view, stressing that he 'sought to blow up the bourgeois theatrical apparatus, and to create a theatrical form that is in accordance with our [that is, a proletarian] common world view'.¹³⁸ To do so he integrated various media into the spectacle, drawing on avant-garde principles of montage in seeking to refunction the techniques and influence of mass commercial media, disrupting in the process the (proletarian) audience's relationship to the spectacle.¹³⁹ Nevertheless, this anti-bourgeois avant-gardism proved popular with some bourgeois audiences as well.

Piscator's success with both bourgeois and working-class audiences was also a strength, especially when it came to plays like those on the abortion question which, as I will discuss later in the chapter, helped bring new political coalitions into being. His Proletarian Theatre also had a major impact on the emergence of grassroots worker-theatre and agitprop movements. Throughout his career Piscator worked closely with working-class actors and other amateurs, an approach he shared with Brecht as well as some of the BPRS writers, including Berta Lask and Ludwig Renn. It was precisely the 'primitive' nature of the agitprop approach that, as Richard Bodek argues, was so interesting to radical playwrights like Brecht.¹⁴⁰ But, while these famous playwrights sometimes wrote for the agitprop troupes, the movement grew primarily from below through a proliferating number of left theatre societies and groups located in working-class communities. This was similar to the worker-photographer movement, but with the major difference that, unlike with the *AIZ*, there was no centralised media outlet that filtered and set limits on what was ultimately seen. Agitprop troupes could stage their productions in many different locations, including the courtyards of the *Mietskaserne*, the tenements that were the locus of working-class life in Berlin and other large cities. They required few resources, giving the movement a strong grassroots character, and providing a challenge not only to the bourgeois theatre, but also to more professionalised forms of socialist theatre like the *Volksbühne*.

Crucial to agitprop, as I have suggested, was the development of an aesthetic rooted in the protest culture that shaped contestations over urban public space.

137 'Proletarisches Theater', in Mühsam 1978, 2, p. 380.

138 'Über die Aufgaben der Arbeiterbühne', in Piscator 1968, 2, pp. 44–45.

139 Willett 1988, pp. 106–10.

140 Bodek 1997, pp. 149–51. See also Willett 1988, pp. 121–35, although he tends to focus on well-known figures like Piscator rather than the grassroots developments.

The later Weimar years saw a return of the political upheaval that shaped its early years and that, as we saw in earlier chapters, spurred the emergence of new radical cultural movements. In terms of agitprop, while its roots can be found in those early years, it was really in the later period that the movement exploded, inspired in part by a 1927 tour of a Soviet 'living newspaper' troupe, the *Blaue Blusen* (the Blue Blouses). Over a nine-month period in 1930, to give an example of the movement's scope, different troupes performed a total of 1,400 times before 500,000 spectators in the Berlin region alone.¹⁴¹ While Berlin was the centre of the movement, with the city's Red Megaphone the best-known troupe thanks in part to its appearance in *Kuhle Wampe*, groups sprang up in many major urban centres,¹⁴² and especially amongst radical sailors in port cities.¹⁴³

The troupes presented a welcome development in terms of recruitment and propaganda, but also posed a challenge for the KPD. The Party's support for the movement was evident in a 1930 *Rote Fahne* review of a performance by the 'Red Wedding' troupe, named after a working-class district in Berlin. The performance took place in the courtyard of a *Mietskaserne*, with the review providing a breathless description of the residents thronging the courtyard and looking down from their windows above. The reviewer was especially pleased that the performance provided fund-raising for the KPD's election campaign, with the troupe collecting money from the audiences. The article also lauded the subsequent transformation of the performance into a protest that ended with the troupe and the residents marching out into the city, gathering others as they went. Adapting a line from the troupe's signature song, the reviewer writes '[l]eft, left, left, left, despite Zörgiebel's police', before toasting the troupe's success: '[b]ravo, Red Wedding! You have taken the last decisive step from a political theatrical club to tough mass party agitation!'¹⁴⁴

For all the support it offered, the KPD remained worried about the grass-roots nature of agitprop work, which often meant that performances deviated significantly from the Party line.¹⁴⁵ Indeed, performers were often poorly versed in Party doctrine, and their plays tended to address local issues as much as broader questions of revolutionary politics. In this respect theatre reflected

141 Jelavich 1993, pp. 215–25.

142 Bodek 1997, pp. 80–93; Frohn 1997, pp. 135–36; Grape 1983.

143 Weihe 2001.

144 'Links, links, links im Hof der Mietskaserne', in Hoffmann and Hoffmann-Ostwald 1977, 2, p. 18. Karl Zörgiebel was Berlin's notorious SPD police president, blamed by communists for the growing repression directed at the KPD.

145 Bodek 1997, pp. 80–103; Stourac and McCreery 1986, pp. 119–29.

a broader problem faced by the Party as, a point noted earlier, the massive rise in unemployment and purging of communist workers from workplaces had shifted Party activism to the streets and neighbourhoods.¹⁴⁶ Local issues such as social welfare and access to food and housing became increasingly more important than the Party's traditional focus on the workplace.¹⁴⁷

The dramatic increase in radical right activity was another key development in the Depression years that reshaped street life and set the contours for agit-prop interventions. Paramilitary groups, most notably the right-wing veterans' organisation the *Stahlhelm* and the Nazi SA, sought to violently assert control over the streets, especially in working-class neighbourhoods. The *Stahlhelm* practiced a limited and tactical violence as a way of securing space, whilst the SA increasingly embraced unrestrained violence. Both, however, mobilised around the radical right approach discussed in the second chapter, 'styl[ing] themselves', as Dirk Schumann argues of the *Stahlhelm*, 'as a model of a seemingly classless national community led by its leaders in accordance with the principle of command and obedience'.¹⁴⁸

The police stood behind these radical right formations. The 'Bloody May' (*Blutmai*) of 1929, which marked a key turning point in the political culture of the left, provides an exemplary demonstration. Faced with the growth of working-class protests as the Depression took hold, the SPD police president Karl Zörgiebel banned the traditional May Day marches in Berlin under the pretext of protecting public order.¹⁴⁹ Communist activists prepared to defy the ban, with the Red Front Fighters' League (*Roter Frontkämpferbund*, or RFB), the communist answer to the right-wing paramilitaries, playing an important but much debated role.¹⁵⁰ Police mobilised in working-class districts across the city, a provocation that ratcheted up tensions and quickly led to the police

146 For a discussion of this shift and how it deepened the gulf between the SPD and KPD, see Geary 2000. He notes the extreme case of the Ruhr area where, in mid-1932, around 90% of KPD members were unemployed (p. 208).

147 On the prominence of social welfare, see Crew 1998b, pp. 235–37. Eve Rosenhaft discusses the KPD's ambivalence to community organising in Berlin (1983, pp. 9–18), which shifted somewhat with the growth in Nazi violence (pp. 24–27).

148 Schumann 2009, p. 310.

149 Kurz 1988; Schirmann 1991; Swett 2004, pp. 120–36.

150 As Pamela Swett argues, police and the non-communist press reported that they were behind the events and represented the primary threat to public order, but RFB members were ordered not to appear in formation or in uniform, and it is difficult to determine the extent of their involvement. What is clear is that the protests had a broad base (2004, pp. 126–28). See Voigt 2009 for a comprehensive study of the development of the RFB, with a primary focus on Saxony.

launching violent assaults. Residents verbally abused police and threw things from tenement roofs and windows. The police responded with live ammunition, firing indiscriminately into crowds and systematically shooting at people in windows in the tenements above them, especially windows displaying red flags. The powerful Prometheus documentary *Fighting May 1929* (*Kampfmai 1929*) recorded the effects of this violence, showing buildings and windows pock-marked with bullet holes across working-class areas.¹⁵¹

Over the first three days of May the police killed 32 people and wounded as many as 200.¹⁵² The events had a massive impact on the KPD and the political dynamics of the last years of the Weimar period. Given the SPD's control over the police, the massacres dramatically increased the hostility of the KPD and its supporters towards the social democrats, playing a significant role in cementing the policy of social fascism that was ultimately so damaging to the KPD's efforts. Bloody May was but one more example of the dramatically unequal and often violent justice long meted out to communist activists. The massacres had a major impact on the development of proletarian culture as well. Along with the film *Fighting May 1929*, Klaus Neukrantz's classic of proletarian literature *Barricades in Wedding* (*Barrikaden am Wedding*), published in the 'red-one-mark-series', responded to the events by integrating documentary evidence into the narrative.¹⁵³ It was the worker-photographer movement, though, that provided some of the most prominent challenges to official actions and narratives. The promise to intervene 'With the Camera Between Truncheon and Carbine', as the lead article in the June 1929 issue of *Der Arbeiter-Fotograf* was entitled,¹⁵⁴ was made good in an extensive archive of images detailing the atrocities published in the *AF*, the *AIZ*, and in a multitude of other communist publications (Ill. 30).

The agitprop theatre troupes active in the working-class districts where the fighting took place were directly involved in the events of Bloody May and their aftermath. As the review of the 1930 'Red Wedding' show discussed earlier indicates, theatrical troupes responded to Bloody May by fusing their performances more directly with political action. Their signature song, written with the well-known composer Hanns Eisler and lyricist Erich Weinert, was in part about police repression in Wedding, a district in Berlin, proclaiming:

151 This film was shown as part of a fascinating exhibition entitled 'Eskalation der Gewalt – Blutmai 1929' ('Escalation of Violence – Blutmai 1929') in the Mitte-Museum in Berlin 2009–10. The material presented there has informed my discussion here.

152 Schirmann 1991; Kurz 1988; Leßmann-Faust 2000.

153 Neukrantz 1970.

154 *Der Arbeiter-Fotograf* 1929, p. 107.

The ruling class's bloody face,
 Red Wedding will not forget
 The shame of the SPD!¹⁵⁵

While the communist left was radicalised by the May events, it also emboldened police, who increased their attacks on the left. This was especially the case after the Prussian SPD government of Otto Braun was ousted by the national government in mid-1932, giving Nazi and other right-wing street fighters an even greater freedom of action.¹⁵⁶ Agitprop theatre itself was one target of the repression, with the police briefly banning performances in 1930, and right-wing thugs targeting them regularly. Agitprop was thus deeply embedded in the street politics of the later Weimar period.

The integration of agitprop troupes into these struggles makes any consideration of their work on purely aesthetic grounds rather inadequate. What is especially interesting is that they offered a somewhat different mode of contesting public space than the KPD or RFB in that they had a higher proportion of women involved than in other areas of Party activity. The turn to street fighting coupled with the social fascist approach left the Party isolated, a structural weakness that found its expression in the growing masculinisation of Party culture.¹⁵⁷ As had been the case in the early Weimar period as well, the militarisation of politics tended to lead to a stress on physical confrontation, ultra-left adventures, and broad if informal limitations on the ability of women to participate in the life of the Party. Indeed, Dirk Schumann argues that the growth in the Party's electoral support in this period happened despite rather than because of the turn to militant and sometimes violent street-based activism.

155 'Der Rote Wedding', in Hoffmann and Hoffmann-Ostwald 1977, 2, p. 15. See also Bodek 1997, pp. 88–89.

156 Pamela Swett 2007 argues that while the profoundly unequal application of justice did characterise the later Weimar period, this needs to be qualified. Both the social workers (generally SPD-oriented women who in many cases had been assigned to defendants years before their arrest) and the judicial officials (conservative men) who together determined the application of justice granted a limited legitimacy to violence, and took a variety of factors beyond party affiliation into account when deciding on charges, convictions, and sentencing; these included especially individual character, intent and motivation, and the general context of the crime. Nevertheless, party affiliation remained an important determining factor on who was charged, conviction rates, and types of punishment.

157 Rosenhaft 1983, pp. 57–87; Swett 2004, pp. 80–100; Weitz 1997, pp. 160–232.

With its violent tactics, the KPD leadership bound the hard core of its base – which included also the women and children among the demonstrators – more closely to itself, but beyond that it gained few supporters and also scared away many unemployed from involvement with the Communists . . . The steady increase in the number of voters who backed the KPD did not signal approval of its actions, and certainly not a generally higher readiness to engage in violence on the part of the workers, but a fundamental protest against the policies of the Reich governments and against a helplessly floundering SPD.¹⁵⁸

For supporters of agitprop, then, the participatory and spontaneous nature of productions represented the key value of the movement. Many in the KPD resisted this approach, however, reflecting the KPD's broader resistance to its Luxemburgist heritage. A debate in the pages of *Die Linkskurve* in 1930 highlighted these issues. Maxim Vallentin, a founder of the Red Megaphone troupe, contributed a reflection on agitprop in which he argued that the movement originated less 'from theatre loving people who seek a Sunday outlet from their embittered everyday life', and far more from 'the needs of the broader proletarian mass who want to see both actual daily events (i.e., the Sklarek scandal and similar matters) as well as profound political problems (i.e., the threat of war, capitalist rationalisation, the construction of socialism) clearly represented in a straightforward Marxist formulation through theatrical means'.¹⁵⁹ In a nod to the KPD's official line, Vallentin proposed that agitprop was thus a response to both the 'fascist and social fascist' theatre.¹⁶⁰

Despite this gesture to Party doctrine, Vallentin's article generated substantial controversy. He himself claimed in a letter published in the following issue that his article had been expanded and distorted by the editors,

158 Schumann 2009, p. 241. Schumann argues that the KPD was not alone in this, with the streetfighting culture that developed meaning that in the period "masculinity", though with connotations that varied in their aggressiveness, became a central value in all political subcultures' (p. 305). This was certainly true, but also needs to be qualified by an attention to the practices that escaped from or even resisted this general tendency. Schumann also does not draw out the implications of this masculinisation as part of his broader analysis.

159 Vallentin 1930b, p. 18. The Sklarek scandal was a prominent corruption scandal involving the SPD that began in Berlin in 1929. Both the KPD and the Nazis used the scandal to attack the SPD, which was slow to respond and suffered significant damage as a result. This was another event that poisoned the relationship between the SPD and the KPD (see Harsch 1993, pp. 69–71).

160 Vallentin 1930b, p. 19.

contending that their changes had downplayed the radical difference he had argued existed between agitprop and bourgeois theatre. Agitprop, he responded, 'does not paint the bourgeois form red';¹⁶¹ this was the approach taken by petty-bourgeois 'radical' theatre or cabaret. Agitprop challenged bourgeois theatre at a more fundamental level by abolishing the different roles (writer, director, actors, etc.) on which bourgeois theatre was grounded. 'The collective is its [agitprop's] bearer', and it should only be judged by its 'combat value [*Kampfwert*]'.¹⁶² Vallentin's defence of agitprop thus highlighted the extent to which the movement saw itself as embodying the class struggle. The claim in his initial article that '[t]he party gives the analysis of the class situation, and we seek to portray the results of that analysis through a concrete staging'¹⁶³ seems to be one of the editorial editions that he rejected. Agitprop, he argued, emerged much more directly out of the material lived experience of the working class.

The editors of *Die Linkskurve*, whose interventions into his earlier article had prompted Vallentin's letter, were unconvinced. They rejected the notion of 'combat value' as a primary aesthetic criterion, arguing that 'if this equation of the class struggle with its conscious ideological expression on the stage were correct, then comrade Vallentin should simply plant a machine-gun on his stage. Its value for the struggle is beyond a doubt'.¹⁶⁴ This approach, they protested, would lead to a theatre in which brochures and newspaper articles were simply read on stage, a critique that implies a distancing from an unmediated understanding of 'reportage'. Significantly, the editorial response also honed in on Vallentin's claim for the abolition of distinct roles in the theatre so characteristic of agitprop:

through this not at all progressive, in fact backward, utopia that decrees a future collective society without a division of labour, he then inexpressibly and unnecessarily hinders the emergence of a proletarian-revolutionary theatre, and thereby wrests an ideological weapon from the hand of the proletariat engaged in the class struggle.

From all of that follows the suggestion that, in artistic areas as in others, not much can be achieved through rhetorical radicalism.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶¹ Vallentin 1930a, p. 15.

¹⁶² Vallentin 1930a, p. 16.

¹⁶³ Vallentin 1930b, p. 19.

¹⁶⁴ *Die Linkskurve* 1930, p. 16.

¹⁶⁵ *Die Linkskurve* 1930, p. 17.

The arguments against agitprop bring us back to the Bakhtinian ideal of a theatre without spotlights. Whereas Vallentin's theatrical ideal gestured towards an embodied and integrated response to social and political repression (albeit without the laughter associated with Bakhtin's notion of carnival), many cultural activists both inside and outside the Party stressed the importance of political and aesthetic discipline, of a separation between leader and follower, performer and audience. Behind these debates, as I have indicated, lay the longstanding and contentious disputes over 'spontaneity'. If we return to the Luxemburgist ideal of spontaneity and the example of the radical council movement of the early Weimar period, we can see the extent to which the agitprop movement arguably sought to reignite this type of participatory politics in one of the only spaces still available for such organising – the theatre of the streets.

While it would be a mistake to suggest that agitprop theatre avoided the increasingly militarist and masculinist forms of embodied politics of the KPD, their work was premised on an approach that echoed Luxemburg's conception of spontaneity. As she described it in seeking unsuccessfully to block ultra-left currents at the KPD's founding congress, '[t]he masses must learn to use power, by using power. . . . Action for us means that the workers' and soldiers' councils must realize their mission and must learn how to become the sole public authorities throughout the realm'.¹⁶⁶ Writing in 1919, Karl Korsch, a key early theorist of the council movement barred from the KPD in 1926, similarly argued that '[s]ocialization is the social revolution – it is the socialistic concept in flesh and reality developed through practical human-sensuous activity'.¹⁶⁷ It was this desire for an integrated politics that was evident in agitprop's abolition of the reified separations of bourgeois theatre, of a staging without footlights. Korsch's formulation is especially significant as it stresses 'human-sensuous activity', an embodied conception of politics ('the socialistic concept in flesh') that located revolutionary praxis in lived experience rather than Party doctrine. This was especially significant in a context of increasing repression

166 Luxemburg, 'Speech to the Founding Convention of the German Communist Party', in Luxemburg 1970, pp. 426–27.

167 Korsch 1977, p. 125. This perspective influenced his *Marxism and Philosophy*, published in 1923. The approach he took there was rejected by KPD and Comintern authorities and spurred his break from the Party. Writing of his approach in that book, he commented in 1930 that it was 'different from the *system of intellectual oppression* established in Russia today' in that the idea of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' had there given way to a vanguardist leadership role for the Party that was incompatible with a politics rooted in the proletariat itself (Korsch 1970, pp. 125–26).

from the state and the resurgent radical right, but also of the suffocating politics of social fascism enacted by the KPD. Despite often tending to replicate the KPD's militant and masculinist action, agitprop thus opened a window onto alternate forms of cultural and political action. The implications of this approach can be seen most clearly perhaps in one area in which radical theatre played a central role, namely in struggles over the decriminalisation of abortion.

6.5 Radical Cultures of the Body: The Left and the Struggle over Abortion

In 1923 an anonymous group of proletarian women in Hamburg wrote an agitational play entitled §218. *Under the Whip of the Abortion Paragraph*. The play pioneered the collective writing and aesthetic characteristic of agitprop, and was especially notable for its subject matter: the criminalisation of abortion. As we saw with the film *Kuhle Wampe*, by the late 1920s the fight against §218 – the paragraph in the Penal Code outlawing the provision and procurement of abortions – had become a prominent part of left and feminist activism. In 1923, however, the play stood out in championing this issue. In three loosely connected acts, §218 touched on all of the key KPD approaches to gender, the family, and reproductive politics, but it also offered a more sustained and potentially radical way of conceptualising the relationships between gender, class, and reproduction. The fact that the play was written by working-class women themselves introduced a very interesting dynamic; while remaining faithful to the broad strokes of KPD policy, it brought in dimensions of lived experience that strongly inflected the narrative in instructive ways.

The play is primarily concerned with the classed dynamics of the criminalisation of abortion. A rich woman – whose miserly response to her poor servant demonstrates the profound hypocrisy of bourgeois society – is easily able to procure an abortion, while a poor woman, already burdened with four children and unable to support another, is refused help by both a doctor and the welfare bureaucracy. The doctor and the welfare officer blame her for her situation, the woman responding by denouncing the hypocrisy of a system that criminalises abortion while allowing children to live and die in poverty after they are born, a common theme in anti-§218 activism. Unable to procure a legal abortion, she does so illegally and, denounced by her welfare officer, is imprisoned. It is in prison that she meets other women who together pledge to work towards the overthrow of the capitalist system that produces their misery. The play cements this systemic critique in leaving characters unnamed,

identified generically in the script or by their occupational or class status, a tactic that allows the characters to stand in for their social classes.¹⁶⁸

The stress on the primacy of capitalism in this narrative puts the play firmly in the KPD tradition, but where it differs is in its unusual emphasis on gendered social relations. The second act of the play centres on an extended interaction between the woman seeking an abortion, a communist friend, and the woman's unemployed husband. He returns home to find the two women talking and is outraged, demanding the 'comrade' (as she is designated in the script) leave. The argument turns into a debate on his anger, with the comrade asking why he blames his wife for his suffering. 'Why do [male] workers play the role of the master within the family? The proper place to assert your mastery is there, in your workplace where you are oppressed, where you are the servants of your capitalists; that is where the workers who, after all, create value, must be the masters'.¹⁶⁹ Capitalism oppresses the husband but, she stresses, he needs to realise that '[t]hrough this capitalist social order, your wife is even more strongly exploited than you'.¹⁷⁰ The comrade evokes an alternative social order based on companionate marriage being implemented in Soviet Russia; the woman seeking an abortion is especially affected by the vision of childrearing as a joyful experience.

The play thus foregrounds possible alternative forms of marital and sexual relations that, as we saw in earlier chapters, were often promoted by cultural radicals or in anarchist traditions as key to a truly emancipatory politics. At the same time, the evocation of joyful childrearing reflects the KPD's argument that abortion was an evil made necessary by capitalist inequalities and oppression. In §28 the possibilities of change are constrained by class conditions; the husband is briefly intrigued by the new relationships being proposed, but the couple's experiment in mutual communication breaks down under the pressures of poverty and the woman's admission that she is pregnant. The husband, like the doctor and the welfare officer before him, blames her and thus, the

168 Thus, the rich woman is called 'Frau Reicher' (Mrs. Richy), and doctors, welfare officials, and others are identified by occupation. Others are simply 'the woman' or 'the man', with the exception, as I note below, of the politically active comrade and the prisoners. In prison, the wardens have names. One, 'Fräulein Ehrlich' (Ms. Honest), is fired by the Inspector for her lax discipline with the prisoners and is replaced by 'Fräulein Zicke' (Ms. Bitch or Cow), who proceeds to lay down the law.

169 §218. *Unter der Peitsche* 1923, p. 9. This response foregrounds the way in which gendered subjectivities are reproduced through the division of labour, although the passage tends not to question that division in a more fundamental way in stressing that the man's 'proper' place is the workplace.

170 §218. *Unter der Peitsche* 1923, p. 10.

play suggests, participates in the gendered practices that cement the power of capital and block the possibilities for revolutionary action. While the woman cannot find proletarian solidarity at home, she does discover it in prison where she meets a number of other criminalised women performing prison labour. Each is identified in the play by their 'crime': thief, adulteress, prostitute, political prisoner, abortionist. The play stresses the extent to which this criminalisation is structured by class and capitalism, but also makes clear that capitalist social relations are elaborated through a complex politics of gender, sexuality, and morality.

The prison functions much like the workplace in Marxist theory, serving as a locus where the women develop a transformed consciousness through their collective discussion and struggle against the overbearing warder. The communist political prisoner serves as the catalyst for their lessons, but interestingly the woman arrested as a prostitute is also given a key role. This is perhaps not surprising given the alliances between communist women and sex workers in Hamburg that we saw in the fourth chapter. The prostitute mocks the desire for love of the other women, arguing that it is but a myth. The political prisoner agrees, asking: '[i]n what way then are we better than you? Don't we all have to sell our bodies, our entire life, to our exploiters?'¹⁷¹ This approach aligns the prostitute's woes with that of the other women who are also doubly exploited, forced into the economically grounded constraints of bourgeois marriage as well as working for wages. The play thus highlights the complex ways in which gendered forms of oppression and consciousness structure capitalism; the criminalisation of abortion is posited as a key dimension of these gendered practices. The political prisoner has a copy of the communist *Hamburger Volkszeitung* featuring a story on the KPD's agitation for a repeal of §218 and §219.¹⁷² Indeed, as one of the women is shocked to learn, this issue marks a key difference between the KPD and the SPD, the latter not supporting repeal. Having performed her task, the political prisoner is hauled off to solitary confinement, leaving the other women with a new consciousness of the nature of

171 §218. *Unter der Peitsche* 1923, p. 17.

172 Until 1926, when the abortion provisions were consolidated into §218 and the penalties reduced, more than one clause addressed the issues. The title 'Volkszeitung', or 'people's paper', was widely used by both the SPD and KPD. The Hamburg *Volkszeitung*, affiliated with the KPD, should thus not be confused with the SPD's Leipzig paper of the same name mentioned earlier (the latter in fact went through various political alignments: edited by Franz Mehring, it was associated with the Luxemburg tendency in the pre-war SPD, then affiliated itself with the USPD after the split before becoming an SPD paper when the USPD dissolved in 1922).

social and political oppression.¹⁷³ The play ends with the imprisoned women pledging to move forward and not simply delegate their power to men.

§218 is significant for its gendered reading of class politics in which questions of degeneration move to the fore, especially through the themes of crime, prostitution, and reproductive politics that run through the play. This is most evident in a discussion between the doctor and the bourgeois woman in which the servant, whose situation the play reads in terms of economic and social factors, is condemned with diagnoses of hysteria, neurasthenia, and psychosis.¹⁷⁴ The play thus develops implicit critiques of the idea of the *Volkskörper* and the ways in which social inequalities and contradictions were contained through medicalising and criminalising practices. Most importantly in this respect, the play foreshadowed the struggle against the criminalisation of abortion that broke out later in the decade, and that involved a broad-based movement encompassing the KPD, feminist groups, sex reformers, and non-affiliated women. This movement, as I will show in this section, was one of very few areas where the KPD worked with other left groups and social movements. At its heart was a recognition of the extent to which not only capitalism in general, but the growing strength of the radical right in particular, was premised on a repressive politics of embodiment, and that any radical political project needed to incorporate this recognition at the core of its analysis and activism. Reproductive politics, and hence abortion, thus became central to a resurgent emancipatory politics and, as the example of §218 suggests, culture. Thus, in the dying days of the Republic as the organisational bases of the left were being increasingly undermined, this struggle offered the most sustained if ultimately unsuccessful challenge to the rise of the right.¹⁷⁵

In this section, then, I will explore the significance of reproductive politics in the later Weimar years. The centrality of abortion in this period was no accident, I argue. As I stressed in the introduction to the book, debates over

173 In making the KPD so central to this coming to consciousness, the play does seriously underestimate the significance of women's own action and experience in this process, an omission especially evident when the play blames women for their passivity during the post-War revolutions. As we saw in the second chapter, women had been mobilised during the War, but were actively excluded from expanding their activism in its aftermath.

174 §218. *Unter der Peitsche* 1923, p. 5.

175 The significance of what is now called the pro-choice movement for the broader history of the period remains largely unrecognised, although a number of excellent studies, especially by feminist historians, have begun to change this (see especially Grossmann 1995; Osborne 2007). Interest in this history was sparked by the resurgence of feminist agitation around abortion in West Germany in the 1970s, with Petra Schneider's book (1975) leading the way in this respect.

reproduction were deeply implicated in the broad changes brought on by the emergence of capitalism, industrial development, and urban expansion, all of which put massive pressure on individuals and populations. The politics of degeneration, I argued there, thus needs to be understood as central to the development of capitalist modernity, encoding forms of control and discipline through which capitalist social relations could be stabilised and sustained. In this section, I trace the history of debates over abortion that culminated in the emergence of the fight against §218. The cultural politics of that movement, I argue, offered the most significant emancipatory left challenge to these forms of repressive politics, one that engaged deeply and critically with the politics of the *Volkskörper* that has been at the heart of this book.

In a broad sense, the KPD and the SPD had long stressed the social bases of bodily health, challenging the reductive biological determinism of dominant conceptions of the *Volkskörper*. As the communist doctor Leo Klauber succinctly put it in 1923 in a popular pocket resource book for communist workers, '[t]he sickness of capitalism will only be overcome through the proletarian revolution!'¹⁷⁶ In its more radical forms this social perspective on sickness implied a critical understanding of the role of ideas of 'health' in wide-ranging repressive politics targeting prostitution, homosexuality, sodomy, and other such 'disorders' as symptoms of the degeneration of the *Volkskörper*. In 1929, for instance, Eduard Alexander argued in *Die Linkskurve* that criminalisation of sodomy was itself a symptom of a sick social order. 'The more rotten a social order becomes, the more frail and hypocritical its morality, then the more barbaric its legal threats in defense of the so-called moral purity of the people [*Volk*] becomes. Not least for this reason is the draft proposal for the rewritten article of the penal code on sodomy a sign of the times.'¹⁷⁷ Yet, as we have seen, such left critiques were not always common, with many on the left tending to replicate the bourgeois moral strictures. This was the case in relation to prostitution, dissident sexualities, racial and social hygiene, or disability, as we saw in the fourth and fifth chapters, and also often involved the reassertion of normative models of the family and gender relations. We will see a similar ambivalence at work in reproductive politics.

Cornelie Usborne argues that the broader tensions structuring the emergence of capitalist modernity in Germany produced an overdetermined relationship between the *Volkskörper* and the *Frauenkörper* (the female body) that

176 Klauber 1923, p. 225.

177 Alexander 1929, p. 5.

shaped debates over gender, sexuality, and reproduction.¹⁷⁸ These tensions and resulting anxieties were exacerbated strongly by the experience of war which, as we saw in the second chapter, was especially significant in shaping the divergent approaches of the left and right, leading at their most extreme to fears over a *Volkstod*, or death of the people.¹⁷⁹ The politics of abortion went to the heart of these demographic debates over the *Volkskörper*. Before the War debates over abortion had already been tied to fears over the declining 'quality' of the population and the decline in birth rates (*Geburtenrückgang*) that went along with urban and industrial development.¹⁸⁰ Given Germany's especially rapid industrialisation, these fears were arguably more pronounced than elsewhere in Europe, and centred on fears of both a relative decline of the German population in relation to other countries, and a skewing of higher birth rates towards those deemed more prone to degeneracy.

These pressures were reflected in varying attempts to regulate reproduction, with doctors and other activists, in particular but not only on the right, promoting interventions to increase the birth rate.¹⁸¹ Neo-Malthusians, including left-wing doctors and many bourgeois feminists, supported birth control measures and, much less frequently, access to abortion. These included prominent figures like the social-democrat Alfred Grotjahn, who stood on the right-wing of the Party and played a leading role in the development of social-democratic ideas of social hygiene, going on to train many of the sex reformers active in the Weimar period.¹⁸² Grotjahn resisted any major changes to the penal provisions on abortion, arguing that the movement against the criminalisation of abortion 'sprang less from the socialist outlook and more from that of the radical liberal women's movement with its exaggerated emphasis on women's rights to self-determination'.¹⁸³ He advocated eugenicist ideas and served as a

178 This is the starting point of her book *The Politics of the Body in Weimar Germany* (Usborne 1992).

179 On the wartime debates over the declining birth rates and the links to the politics of abortion, see Putzke 2003, pp. 109–28.

180 The birth rate dropped from 43.1 per thousand in the 1870s to 9.9 in 1923 (Grossmann 1995, p. 4). Lower infant and adult mortality rates, however, meant that there was no corresponding drop in the population.

181 On these debates, see Hagemann 1991; Krassnitzer and Overath 2007; Usborne 1992; Weipert 2006.

182 In his posthumously published memoirs, Grotjahn noted that it was often difficult to remain a social democrat given his 'rejection of the theory of class struggle and other Marxist views' (quoted in Schwartz 1995, p. 77).

183 Quoted in Putzke 2003, p. 230.

member of the Berlin Society for Racial Hygiene,¹⁸⁴ but he resisted the biological racial theory propagated by right-wing eugenicists, contending that most social problems were environmental rather than hereditary and should be dealt with through rationalised social hygienic planning.¹⁸⁵ Grotjahn's ideas continued to find support in the post-1919 SPD, although the KPD tended to be suspicious of neo-Malthusian approaches, rightly arguing that its proponents ignored the social contexts of population politics and tended to replicate bourgeois fears of a proliferating working class. For the KPD, as a Party statement published in *Die Internationale* in 1922 argued, '[t]he decline of the birth rate is one of the symptoms of the decline of contemporary society as a whole'.¹⁸⁶ Their support for the decriminalisation of abortion and birth control was premised on this analysis of capitalism.

The pro-natalist and neo-Malthusian positions were linked by a shared concern with the health and fitness of the *Volkskörper* and a belief, which could be articulated in dramatically different ways, in social or racial hygiene and eugenics as a response. Differences arose over how to define the problem, in particular in terms of the relative weight to be given to social or biological factors in the health of the *Volkskörper*, and what interventions should be implemented. These differences were reflected in debates within the BdF, the umbrella organisation of bourgeois women's groups. In 1910 a motion advocating decriminalisation was proposed by the radical feminists Helene Stöcker and Marie Stritt. This was rejected, with the organisation calling instead for reduced penalties, and exceptions for cases of rape, danger to the mother, or for eugenic criteria. The motion argued that eugenic abortions should only be permitted where 'it can be expected with certainty that the child will enter life severely handicapped either physically or mentally'.¹⁸⁷ Only this compromise approach, Maria Lichnewska argued, could help reverse the declining birth rate while simultaneously protecting the fitness of the race.¹⁸⁸

On the left, a greater focus tended to be placed on the social roots of reproductive issues. Prior to the War, the radical wing of the SPD had refused to disentangle debates over population politics from issues of labour or militarism, with the 'birth strike' proposed by the social-democratic physicians Alfred

184 Usborne 1992, pp. 133–41.

185 Schwartz 1995, pp. 70–80. Schwartz argues against the prevailing view of Grotjahn as a more radical eugenicist put forward by Gisela Bock and others.

186 'Die Stellung der KPD zu den §§218 und 219' 1981, p. 111.

187 Quoted in Repp 2000, p. 714.

188 Repp 2000, pp. 710–14.

Bernstein and Julius Moses in 1913 standing as a key example of this.¹⁸⁹ Even among radicals, though, there was a substantial resistance to the calls coming from working-class women themselves for the decriminalisation of abortion, with key Party figures like Clara Zetkin or Rosa Luxemburg taking a relatively conservative line.¹⁹⁰ Unlike the Party leadership, as Cornelia Osborne's important study argues, working-class women (and often men) overwhelmingly tended to see abortion and birth control as legitimate, pragmatic, and rather mundane parts of family management; for them, the only problem lay in their criminalisation.¹⁹¹

The struggle for the decriminalisation of abortion in the later Weimar years thus went to the heart of these complex issues of class, race, and gender, shaping the politics of the *Volkskörper*. Abortion had been criminalised via the penal code of 1871 under paragraphs 218 through 220, and restrictions were placed on the sale and advertising of contraceptives under the broader provisions against 'trash and filth' that we saw in the last chapter.¹⁹² Criminalisation of abortion did not prevent its dramatic increase over subsequent decades, although criminalisation also makes it difficult to determine concrete numbers. Estimates suggest that there were at least one hundred thousand abortions per year after 1900, climbing to five hundred thousand during the 1920s, and potentially reaching one million at the height of the Depression in the early 1930s.¹⁹³ Estimates of the number of women killed as a result of unsafe procedures run as high as twenty thousand per year during the Weimar period, with §218 often called the 'murder clause' at the time for its devastating impact on women.¹⁹⁴

The hardships of the First World War coupled with moves by the state to limit access to contraception and abortion led activists to demonstrate in front of the Reichstag against the 'insupportable interference into the free right of women's self-determination'.¹⁹⁵ After the War, the SPD's participation in the government led to some attempts at legislative reform, most notably in 1921–22

189 This was discussed in the second chapter.

190 Gabriel 1989, pp. 97–101.

191 Osborne 2007, pp. 16–17.

192 Woycke 1988 gives multiple examples of the use of obscenity laws to control advertising, although, as he points out, with only limited effect.

193 Osborne 1992, p. 102; Woycke 1988, pp. 104–5. On the history of and legal debates over the criminalisation of abortion, see Putzke 2003.

194 20,000 was the number given in the KPD's 1922 statement of their position on the abortion debate ('Die Stellung der KPD zu den §§218 und 219 des Strafgesetzbuches' 1981, p. 110), although most estimates are closer to half that number.

195 Quoted in Osborne 2007, p. 1.

when Gustav Radbruch briefly served as Justice Minister. While Radbruch's proposals for a wide-ranging revamp of the penal code included a relaxation of penalties against abortion providers, he ultimately left these provisions out of his final bill, which itself did not pass. Supporters of decriminalisation, especially the KPD, blamed him and the SPD for not pushing harder on this as on so many other reforms of the existing state structures that left much of the Imperial legal and state apparatus intact.¹⁹⁶ Nevertheless, pressure continued to build in support of legislative reform, eventually bearing some fruit with changes in 1926 that combined the three abortion paragraphs into one (§218) and reduced the severity of the penalties, making the German laws the most liberal in Europe outside the Soviet Union.¹⁹⁷ Still, this was a very limited opening; abortion remained illegal, a provision that only the KPD voted to oppose.

The failure of legislative reform led many activists to extra-parliamentary agitation, including street protests and a range of cultural activism, with an outpouring of novels, plays, films, and artwork agitating for decriminalisation. Activists also redoubled their interest in one of the most distinctive developments around the politics of reproduction that had been established over the course of the Weimar period: the networks of marriage and sex counselling clinics (*Ehe- und Sexualberatungsstellen*) that offered clients a range of services and advice. Some were independent of state control, like the clinic of the left-wing sex reformer Magnus Hirschfeld and his Institute for Sexual Science (*Institut für Sexualwissenschaft*) or those of Helene Stöcker's BfMS (League for the Protection of Mothers and Sexual Reform). In Hirschfeld's case he had obtained support from the SPD state government in Prussia to purchase a large villa in the Tiergarten district of Berlin to house the research activities and archives of the Institute and, beginning in 1919, the Institute provided an open clinic providing assistance with a range of issues. In the first year, most who came sought assistance in dealing with STIs, but over time counselling around birth control and abortion became the primary concern for clients.¹⁹⁸ The clinic itself was led first by Ludwig Levy-Lenz and then Max Hodann, both radical-left doctors prominent in the sex reform movement. The Institute as a whole was unique in the world, and provided a key foundation for the foundation of the World League for Sex Reform in 1928.

196 Osborne 1992, pp. 169–73.

197 Osborne 1992, pp. 173–74. Osborne argues that while many serious problems remained, and that criticisms of the limited scope of the changes was warranted, it is important to keep in mind that they did lead to a substantial reduction in the number and severity of charges faced by women.

198 Soden 1988, pp. 98–105.

Other clinics soon opened as well, although only some, like that of the BfMS, shared Hirschfeld's commitment to sexual reform and liberation.¹⁹⁹ Rather than the federal government, Germany's state governments took a great interest in these developments, especially in Prussia, meaning also that levels of service varied significantly across the country. As Atina Grossmann has argued, the fact that Germany's public health and social insurance systems stressed preventative care made such clinics feasible, and the KPD and working-class women pushed the SPD-led Prussian government to support these experiments.²⁰⁰ Beginning in 1926, the Prussian state developed their own network of marriage and sex counselling clinics that numbered over 200 by 1931. Unlike the non-governmental clinics, which in some cases were partially state funded as well, the state clinics were prohibited from discussing birth control and abortion, limited only to the provision of counselling around marriage and procreative health.

While differences over abortion tended to run along political or religious lines, perhaps the greatest split was that between working-class and elite perspectives. Even when politicians, doctors, and others supported the decriminalisation of abortion, they rarely treated it in the matter of fact way that, as Osborne argues, working-class women did.²⁰¹ Gustav Radbruch is exemplary of politicians who offered some support for decriminalisation, but still argued that any abortion was an 'unnatural interference in the most sacred natural process'.²⁰² Alfred Döblin, who was a doctor as well as a writer, also reflected the ambivalent perspective of sympathetic doctors. He argued strongly in 1931 against §218, condemning it as a 'legal clause out of the feudal era',²⁰³ but stressed that in arguing against the law he was by no means in favour of abortion. 'Human life', he contended, 'life in general, is sacred'.²⁰⁴ Even radical doctors like Heinrich Dehmel argued that 'we revolutionary doctors are also naturally opponents of abortion'. Decriminalisation was absolutely necessary, but more broadly '[w]e must systematically and energetically push through a socially, eugenically, hygienically, psychologically, and erotically sound birth control and reproductive politics and thereby do away with the plague of abortion'.²⁰⁵ Here we see the continued influence of ideas of

199 Mancini 2010.

200 Grossmann 1995, pp. 46–47.

201 Osborne 2007, pp. 16–17.

202 Quoted in Schwitanski 2008, p. 370.

203 Döblin 1999, p. 261.

204 Döblin 1999, p. 260.

205 Dehmel 1930, p. 727.

‘spiritual motherhood’ that we encountered in the second chapter, read in this instance through a communist emphasis on abortion as a social problem.

Despite the fact that many socialist doctors saw abortion as at best a necessary evil, they played key roles in the struggle to decriminalise abortion. Most of these doctors were members of the Association of Socialist Physicians (*Verein Sozialistischer Ärzte*, or vsÄ). Founded in 1913 it reached a membership as high as 1,500 in 1931.²⁰⁶ During the Weimar years the organisation included a strong presence of communist as well as social-democratic doctors, with key figures including Ernst Simmel (a psychoanalyst who wrote extensively on war neuroses), Käthe Kollwitz’s husband Karl, Walter Benjamin’s brother Georg, Magnus Hirschfeld, and Max Hodann.²⁰⁷ Stances on abortion within the organisation ranged from support for outright decriminalisation to those seeking only a relaxation in punitive measures. What differentiated the socialist doctors most strongly from the mainstream of the medical establishment – who were members of the German Medical Association (*Deutscher Ärztenvereinsbund*, or DÄVB) – was their willingness to consider social factors like poverty in relation to abortion. The DÄVB, in contrast, admitted only medical or eugenic indicators as factors, a position reaffirmed at their 1925 congress.²⁰⁸

The different perspectives on abortion between socialist and non-socialist doctors were in part due to politics, but socialist and especially communist doctors also tended to practice in working-class communities, making them much more intimately aware of the social conditions of working-class patients and their views on the abortion issue. This was especially the case for the growing numbers of women doctors. Many of these women organised the Federation of German Women Doctors (*Bund Deutscher Ärztinnen*, or BDÄ) in 1924, their membership reaching 875 by 1931.²⁰⁹ As Osborne argues, women doctors in general tended to be more polarised than their male counterparts, with a substantial number pushing for a complete decriminalisation that went beyond the most radical positions taken by the vsÄ. At the same time, many women

206 Osborne 1992, p. 183. This number was significant, but still quite small compared with the 30,000 members of the German Medical Association (*Deutscher Ärztenvereinsbund*) that represented the mainstream of the profession and which resisted most reforms to the law, acting primarily to establish complete medical control over all aspects of reproductive health.

207 Fuechtner 2004, p. 121.

208 Putzke 2003, pp. 149–55.

209 Putzke 2003, p. 160.

doctors, especially Catholics, remained opposed to any reforms. Whatever their politics, Osborne suggests that '[w]omen doctors also demanded something that male doctors did not seem to stress: a woman's right to a fulfilled life over and above her reproductive work'.²¹⁰

Such a notion of fulfillment was often the sticking point in many of the debates over reproduction in the period, with many advocates of reform or decriminalisation, including communists, retaining a strong investment in maternal ideologies that denied the importance of these factors, a perspective also at work in other key debates that we have looked at over 'double-earners' or women's participation in politics.²¹¹ For the KPD, reproductive issues were seen primarily as a by-product of class inequalities rather than a result of a more fundamental gendering of capitalism and capitalist labour. A constant refrain in both grassroots and KPD critiques of §218 was that it was a 'class law', one that, as the KPD delegate Martha Arendsee argued in 1925, was designed to ensure a high birth rate to secure for capital and the state 'masses for military service, as cannon fodder, and as objects of exploitation'.²¹² Even the SPD's Gustav Radbruch sounded this note, arguing that '[t]here has yet to be a single rich woman brought to court on account of §218'.²¹³

Despite their unwillingness to fully take up working-class women's views of abortion, the KPD was the only party to consistently advocate for decriminalisation. This took place not on the basis of a rights-based discourse, which was rejected by many on the left, including the SPD, as reflective of a bourgeois perspective.²¹⁴ The importance of women's autonomy was recognised in the KPD's endorsement of the slogan 'your body belongs to you' [*dein Körper gehört dir*], but this perspective was subordinated to a broader critique of capitalism, and the Party retained a negative view on abortion itself.²¹⁵ Thus, the KPD's influential 1922 statement on abortion acknowledged that the decline of the birth rate was due in part to increasing numbers of abortions, but that this stemmed from '*the increasing hardship of the working class*'. Abortion itself remained damaging, an '*uneconomical and for women barbarous means of birth control*', and '*[t]he KPD is far from recommending abortion as an ideal*'.²¹⁶ The Party's

210 Osborne 1992, p. 194. See also Putzke 2003, pp. 160–73.

211 On the return of the debates over double-earners in the period, see Swett 2004, pp. 83–86.

212 Quoted in Putzke 2003, p. 258.

213 Quoted in Theesfeld 2006, p. 197.

214 On debates in the SPD, see Schwitanski 2008, pp. 366–76. The contemporary 'pro-choice' movement has largely been framed through this rights-based perspective.

215 Osborne 1992, pp. 179–81.

216 'Die Stellung der KPD zu den §§218 und 219 des Strafgesetzbuches' in Hervé 1981, p. 111.

opposition to the criminalisation of abortion was thus premised on their push in the short term to improve maternal benefits and conditions, and in the long term to abolish capitalism and hence the conditions that, they argued, made abortion necessary. This was a position of principle, but the Party also recognised that their support for decriminalisation served to '*mobilise women in that way for the fight against the entire capitalist social order*'.²¹⁷ Indeed, this instrumental concern with votes and Party mobilisation played an important role in setting policy.

The KPD's push for the abolition of §218 involved repeated proposals for legislative reform. A draft bill for the 'protection of mothers and children' in 1928 was especially comprehensive, combining the abolition of §218 and the end to restrictions on advertising contraceptives with proposals for extensive social supports for child rearing.²¹⁸ At the height of the protests against the law they renewed their efforts; in 1930 they sought to strike down §218 and amnesty all those who had been charged, and the following year proposed legislation mandating full equality for working women.²¹⁹ Women's issues were thus given a relatively prominent rhetorical place (the party's legislation had no chance of passing), even while, as we have seen, the organisational and mobilising logic of the Party tended to strongly marginalise women and produce a heavily masculinist politics.²²⁰ It is thus debatable to what extent their support for decriminalisation garnered them extra support from women.

A number of key events galvanised the broader movement for the decriminalisation of abortion. The onset of the Depression and the reduction in social welfare provisions, which included cuts to funding for marital and sexual-health clinics, made childrearing a rather more daunting prospect and spurred activism around access to abortion. The rise of the radical right in this period was also crucial. As some critics on the left noted, politically reactionary forces were often more successful in mobilising women than they. Thus, Lene Overlach argued in 1930 that despite their rejection of gender equality and women's wage labour, the Nazi's rhetoric of care for German women remained

217 'Die Stellung der KPD zu den §§218 und 219 des Strafgesetzbuches', in Hervé 1981, p. 112.

218 'Gesetzentwurf der Reichsfraction der KPD vom 30. Juni 1928 zum Schutze für Mutter und Kind', in Wolf and Hammer 1978, pp. 84–86.

219 Putzke 2003, pp. 323–24.

220 An attempt to compare the levels of 'masculinism' in the different parties is rather difficult, of course. In some respects the KPD was the most open to women's participation, generally having a slightly higher proportion of their parliamentary caucus made up of women than the SPD, for example, with both dramatically higher than other parties (see Lauterer 2002, pp. 152–57).

attractive to working-class women. Overlach presented this as a problem of false consciousness on the part of women facing extreme hardship, but also noted that 'the far too abstract propaganda of the communists remains incapable of convincing them that women's paid labour is a social advancement'.²²¹ The Party's frequent citing of the Soviet decriminalisation of abortion and provision of state support for childbirth, rearing, and education, was equally abstract and ineffective in mobilising women, although it was stressed often both by communists and sympathisers like Stöcker.²²² §218. *Under the Whip of the Abortion Paragraph* invoked the Soviet example as well, as we saw, the main character greeting the idea of childrearing in a socialist state: '[t]o give birth to children joyfully, imagine if that were possible!'²²³

The KPD's often ambivalent positions meant that others lead the fight for the decriminalisation of abortion, with the impetus for change coming from working-class women and some bourgeois women's organisations. Those who supported criminalisation were equally well organised, with churches, in particular the Catholic Church, leading the charge. Challenging religious influence over public policy was thus a key focus for opponents, who were galvanised by Pope Pius XI's release of his *Casti Connubii* encyclical on New Year's eve 1930.²²⁴ In his encyclical, the pope argued for the immorality of both abortion and birth control.²²⁵ This generated a firestorm of protest from the KPD and activists in the reproductive-rights movement. The KPD in particular developed a combined analysis in which the fight against §218 was intimately linked with attacks on the working class, the struggle against fascism, and the growing hardship of the Depression. Thus, for example, the ironically titled booklet '*Be Fruitful and Multiply!*' from the communist-oriented League of Proletarian Freethinkers (*Zentralverband der proletarischen Freidenker Deutschlands*) excoriated the pope's position, arguing that the Depression had led to a dramatic sharpening of class conflict and exploitation: '[t]he encyclical constitutes one part of the fascist general offensive against the revolutionary proletariat'. The corollary, then, was that the 'struggle against §218 is a struggle against the capitalist system, which needs this paragraph, and against the church as an ideological defence force [*Schutztruppe*] of the exploitative

221 Overlach 1981, p. 118.

222 Koenig 1931, pp. 25–26; Kienle 1932, p. 311.

223 §218. *Unter der Peitsche* 1923, p. 10.

224 Part of the reason for the release of the encyclical was that signs of dissent among Catholic women over the Church's hardline position on abortion were being felt.

225 The encyclical was also notable for reasserting the Church's opposition to eugenics.

social order'.²²⁶ Harkening back to the birth strike argument, population decline is thus reread as a proletarian response to the poverty and exploitation of capitalism. 'The proletariat is fed up with being the fathering and birthing machine of the Moloch capitalism'.²²⁷ Behind the 'murder-paragraph', and hence capitalist order, stands a coalition of forces ranging 'from the swastika to the SPD' against which a people's front needs to be mobilised.²²⁸ Thus, the struggle against §218 was also a struggle against social fascism, although 'social fascists' like Döblin often shared the view that the pope's position reflected the militarist and imperialist need for cannon fodder. Döblin argued further that the desire to root out 'sexual offences' had little to do with morality and much more to do with a puritanical authoritarianism.²²⁹

The wave of protest generated in response to the papal encyclical was stoked by the subsequent arrest of two doctors under §218, Friedrich Wolf and Else Kienle. That mobilisation was led by a broad coalition in which the KPD, the IAH, and a number of other left organisations played central roles.²³⁰ Wolf was close to the KPD and, as we shall see, was better known as a playwright, with his arrest and writing making him one of the most prominent anti-§218 activists in Germany. Wolf and Kienle were charged on 19 February 1931 with seeking commercial gain by providing medical support for abortions as well as performing abortions themselves, charges that carried a potential sentence of 15 years of penal servitude. Wolf's prominence and the support provided by the KPD meant that he was released on bail relatively quickly, but Kienle remained in prison until late March and was released only after staging a debilitating hunger strike.²³¹ The difference between the political positions of the two doctors provides an interesting insight into the political and gendered tensions shaping the movement. Writing in *Die Weltbühne*, Wolf stressed the political connections between the fascist mobilisation against abortion, the papal encyclical, and their arrest, but also noted with satisfaction the push that the outcry gave to communist organising; in the first ten days of the trial the local Party in Stuttgart gained 352 new members.²³² Kienle, on the other hand, who only began to work with the KPD after her incarceration, framed abortion

226 Koenig 1931, p. 3.

227 Koenig 1931, p. 21.

228 Koenig 1931, p. 27.

229 Döblin 1999, p. 261.

230 Brauns 2003, pp. 187–88.

231 For her account, see Kienle 1931, pp. 538–39; Kienle 1932. See also Grossmann 1995, pp. 87–88.

232 Wolf 1931, pp. 413–14.

less in political terms and more as an issue of 'human dignity' and 'women's dignity'.²³³

Kienle's account of her work dwelt primarily on the plight of the women who came to her, many with children already, their suffering etched on their faces. Unlike those working-class women, however, she echoed most doctors in continuing to stress that abortion was a terrible necessity rather than a pragmatic decision. Kienle noted that Wolf himself had four children and argued that 'for every woman the termination of a pregnancy means: a terrible operation on her entire bodily and psychological being'.²³⁴ Nevertheless, for Kienle access to abortion remained fundamentally about women's self-determination, eclipsing even the vote in importance. 'What use do they [women] have for suffrage when despite this they remain unwilling birth machines? This point is decisive in woman's struggle: the conquest of the right over one's own body'.²³⁵ Kienle looked forward to a 'new sexual morality' of 'true equality between the sexes also in the area of the body, eros and sexuality',²³⁶ a position that, as we saw with the play §28, was promoted consistently by women activists.

Unlike Kienle, Wolf tended to portray women as passive victims, a perspective also evident, as we shall see, in his play on abortion. His analysis was especially interesting, though, in foregrounding the importance of a repressive ethics of the body, eros, and sexuality to right-wing mobilisation. His article reached back to the peasant revolts around Stuttgart in the sixteenth century for a parallel social struggle, arguing that the battle over abortion pitted the five million unemployed against the forces of reaction. 'Thus are the two fronts aligned!' he proclaimed. 'A trial of strength for the reaction! A signal for the masses!'²³⁷ Indeed, this is how it seemed in early 1931. The scale of the protests against §218 and in support of Kienle and Wolf was impressive, with demonstrations taking place around the country organised by a variety of groups, from women's organisations to the KPD. Among the largest was a rally at the Berlin Sports Palace on 15 April that attracted 12,000.²³⁸ Anita Augspurg and Lida Gustava Heymann, the feminists who had played such a significant role in the Munich Soviet, organised a debate with an audience of one thousand in

233 Kienle 1931, p. 539.

234 Kienle 1931, p. 535. In her memoir of this time, she argued more broadly that if the social and legal bases of human relations were to be transformed, 'the majority of all the so-called sexual offences would disappear by themselves' (Kienle 1932, p. 312).

235 Kienle 1932, p. 309.

236 Kienle 1932, pp. 309–10.

237 Wolf 1931, p. 418.

238 Putzke 2003, p. 319.

which abortion supporters vocally drowned out opponents. As with so many instances of left organising, the event was ultimately disrupted by Nazi youth shouting anti-Semitic slogans.²³⁹

Other actions followed. A 'Committee of Self-Incrimination' was formed in which prominent people admitted to having had or aided in procuring an abortion; these included Ernst Toller, Thea von Harbou, Else Lasker-Schüler, and Albert Einstein.²⁴⁰ The doctor Heinrich Dehmel, with the support of the director Erwin Piscator, called for a mass self-incrimination by doctors and especially women to overwhelm both the judicial system and public opinion with the sheer numbers of those who had aided in or had an abortion.²⁴¹ For a brief period, then, the struggle moved to the forefront of political organising, with this new front in the battle, as Wolf had argued, offering the possibility of a broad-based social mobilisation against the right. In the wake of these protests, Carl von Ossietzky expressed the widespread sense of promise the movement offered: '[f]or the first time in a long time the initiative no longer lies with the right'.²⁴²

The sense of a new front opening in the battle against the right was nowhere stronger than in the cultural field. This is not surprising given the argument I have been making both in this chapter and throughout the book around the central role played by cultural radicals in raising questions around the politics of embodiment. Thus, while opposition to §218 was built upon the activism of those women most affected by the law, namely poorer and working-class women, it was through theatre, art, film, and writing that the issues were articulated more broadly. Critical contributions to the topic frequently pointed out the class basis of the abortion law as evidence of the hypocrisy of those who proclaimed the sanctity of unborn life. The satirist Kurt Tucholsky's 1931 'The Embryo Speaks' offered one of the best-known examples of this criticism, giving voice to an embryo over which the church, state, doctors, and judges keep watch, only to disappear at the moment of birth.

For fifty years of my life no one will look after me, not a soul. I'll have to shift for myself.

For nine months they kill one another if someone wants to kill me.

Now I ask you: Isn't that a strange welfare system?²⁴³

²³⁹ Grossmann 1995, pp. 86–87.

²⁴⁰ Dohrmann 2000, p. 103.

²⁴¹ Dehmel 1930.

²⁴² Ossietzky 1931, p. 303.

²⁴³ Tucholsky 1990, p. 35.

Hans-José Rehfisch's 1928 play *The Women's Doctor* had a character expressing a similar view, denouncing

this sentimental respect for nascent life – and the unthinking wasting of those already born! Whoever prevents a birth, is shipped to the penitentiary! And whoever delivers millions of live grenades and poison gas has a monument erected to them and is unreachable by any state court.²⁴⁴

The lack of any empathy for the living was the focus of many left accounts. The satirical newspaper *Eulenspiegel*, which was published by one of Willi Münzenberg's companies and reached a peak circulation of over 100,000 in 1931, returned frequently to these themes during the late 1920s and early 1930s. A 1929 poem by Berta Lask entitled 'The New Criminal Law: §218', evoked the despair of an already large working-class family faced with the prospect of another child.

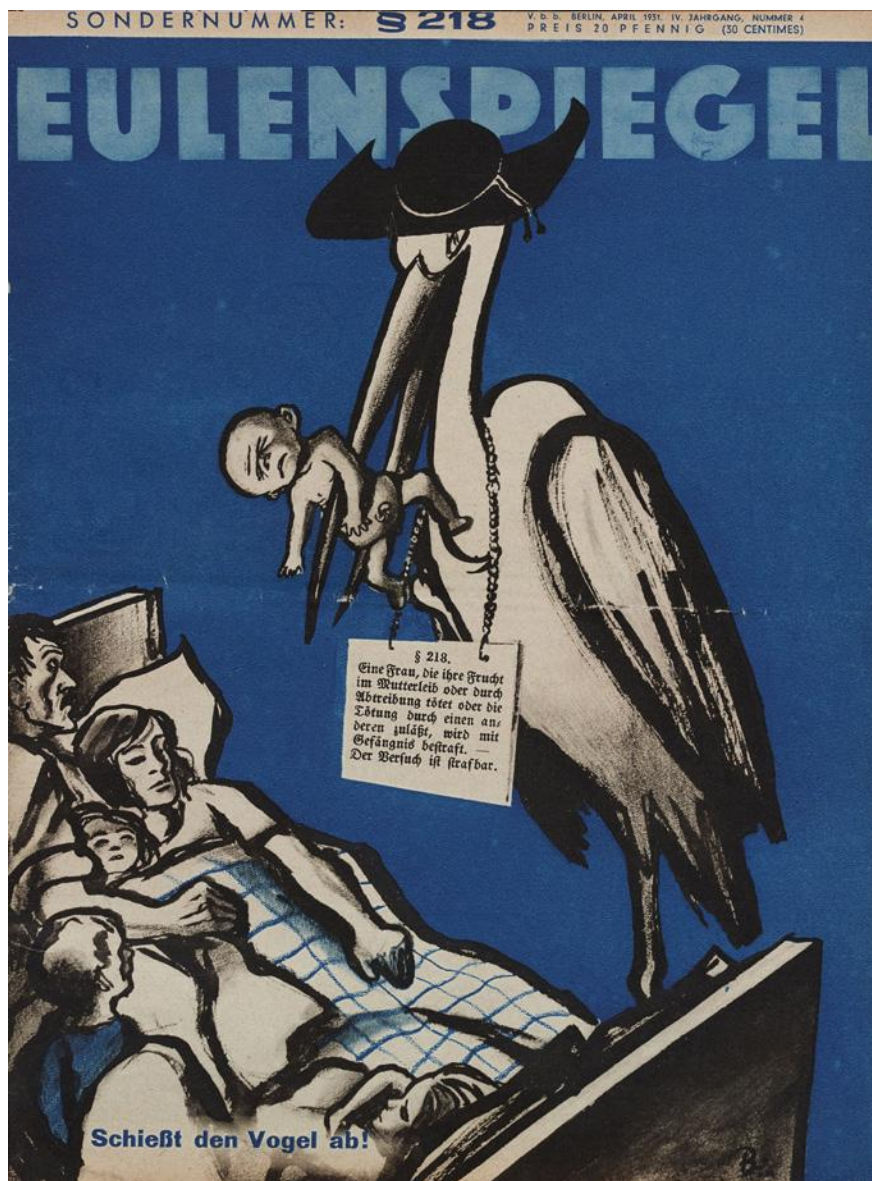
What now?
No bread in the house, no shirt, no dress,
What will a sixth one eat?
Why do I have to carry this new accidental fruit,
In my exhausted workers' body?
Why give birth for death?²⁴⁵

The poem appeared alongside a Käthe Kollwitz image showing the skeletal figure of death brandishing a whip and looming over a woman seeking to shelter her children.

Kollwitz's sketch was one of many she produced for newspapers and posters as part of the campaign against §218, but she was by no means alone in her use of images of death, especially in relation to the law. These were common in *Eulenspiegel*. An October 1930 issue featured a drawing showing a vulture with a cap inscribed '§218' perched on the headboard of a bed glaring at a pale and sickly woman lying beneath it, the caption proclaiming 'under the claws of §218'. The front cover of the paper in April 1931 used a different bird, this time showing a stork wearing a judicial hat with a card on which 'paragraph 218' is written (Ill. 32). Again the bird stands over a crowded bed containing a mother, father, and their three existing children, the emaciated infant slung from its beak representing another unbearable burden.

²⁴⁴ Quoted in Theesfeld 2006, p. 207.

²⁴⁵ Lask 1929, p. 9.

ILLUSTRATION 32 *Front cover, Eulenspiegel, 1931, 4, 4. Digital Image.*

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This last image was unusual simply by virtue of including the father in the frame. Most anti-§218 propaganda showed only mothers, and especially suffering mothers. The feminine passivity that we saw in Kollwitz's work in the fourth chapter returned in her anti-§218 work, and was evident as well in the desire to portray abortion as a necessary evil. Depictions of downtrodden and suffering working-class women arguably resonated strongly with the doctors, bourgeois feminists, and KPD leaders who led the anti-§218 campaigns. Whether working-class women saw themselves reflected in these images is another question. Certainly they would have recognised the economic hardships stemming from childrearing, but the relentless focus on danger may not have fully captured their experiences. As Cornelia Osborne argues, the simple fact that an abortion took place outside the medical establishment did not mean it was potentially deadly. Many of the 'wise women', as they were often called, who provided non-medicalised procedures were highly skilled and their interventions had low rates of complication. The fact that they were predominantly women, while doctors were more often men, added a strong gendered dimension to representations of 'dangerous' illegal procedures. Danger arguably stemmed from criminalisation, but whether medicalisation was the panacea remained an open question given the extent to which medical intervention was so often experienced as a repressive intervention by working-class women.²⁴⁶ In considering representations of abortion, then, we need to be attentive to the ways in which they may not have responded adequately to the complex ways in which women's bodies, especially working-class women's bodies, were enmeshed in webs of regulation and discipline.

The most significant problem in this respect was the predominance of images of women as passively suffering under the impacts of criminalisation. This approach ran through the culture of the anti-§218 movement, generating sympathy, but reinforcing rather than challenging the broader exclusion of women from the political realm. It dominated what was perhaps the single most influential text opposing §218, Friedrich Wolf's 1929 play *Cyankali*.²⁴⁷ First staged in Berlin under Piscator's direction and subsequently made into a film, the play's success undoubtedly prompted Wolf's arrest but, as noted, his resulting fame also fuelled the huge outcry that led to his quick release. 'Cyankali' referred to potassium cyanide, one of the dangerous poisons sometimes used to induce abortions. The play's protagonist, the working-class Hete, is unable to obtain a medical abortion and thus forced to undergo a dirty and dangerous

²⁴⁶ Osborne 2007, pp. 94–126.

²⁴⁷ *Cyankali*, in Wolf and Hammer 1978.

procedure followed by the ingestion of potassium cyanide. The film draws the familiar contrast between a middle-class woman who is able to gain a medical exemption for an abortion and Hete's unfortunate situation, with Hete ultimately suffering an agonising death from the illegal procedure. *Cyankali* foregrounds the impact of the Depression, with Hete and her lover Paul dreaming of a place where they could have a family but confronted instead with the dark and cramped apartment in a *Mietskaserne*, shared with her mother, and a lack of adequate employment. Hete's abortion was thus a terrible necessity forced by economic hardship, exacerbated further by Paul's employer who forces a strike that leads to even greater hunger and want and drives him to break into the factory canteen in order to steal food.

Wolf thus largely followed the KPD narrative in depicting not only the dangers of abortion, but also abortion itself, as the product of an unjust and oppressive social order. He also followed the Party line on the role of art, giving an argument similar to that of the worker-photographers in claiming that '[a]rt today is a searchlight and a weapon'.²⁴⁸ *Cyankali* was exceptionally successful in this respect. First put on by the 'Gruppe Junger Schauspieler' at the Lessing Theatre in Berlin on 6 September 1929, its run continued over a hundred performances into January of the following year. It then went on tour to over a dozen cities in Germany followed by runs in Switzerland and ultimately the Soviet Union. There was certainly much debate over its artistic merit, but even many of those who were critical of that aspect of the play noted its success as an agitational piece. Thus, the prominent critic Herbert Jhering compared it to the reportage style of Peter Martin Lampel's *Revolte im Erziehungshaus*, saying that if it managed to provoke government reform as Lampel's play had done in the case of reformatories, 'then theatre would have fulfilled its purpose'.²⁴⁹ *Cyankali* was simple in its structure, thus embodying all the problems Lukács identified with reportage, but for Jhering 'its primitive means have their place here'.²⁵⁰ Writing in *Rote Fahne* in 1929, the communist critic Durus (Alfréd Kemény) was more willing to proclaim it a 'great and deserved success'.²⁵¹ The language of his review is telling, invoking a powerfully masculinised struggle that cemented the notion of theatre as a weapon. 'Friedrich Wolf's language is powerful, of a true proletarian hardness and lustiness. It comes in the first place

248 'Kunst ist Waffe!', in Wolf and Hammer 1978, p. 107.

249 'Cyankali', in Jhering 1987, p. 381.

250 'Cyankali', in Jhering 1987, p. 382.

251 Durus, "'Gruppe Junger Schauspieler" gegen den Paragraphen 218', in Wolf and Hammer 1978, p. 133.

not out of dramatic effects, but rather from *facts*... Thus, neither unformed reportage nor deformed “writerly” reality, but *dramatically augmented life*.²⁵²

The play’s success helped to galvanise the struggle against §218. Paul’s outraged cry towards the end of the play that ‘[a] law that each year makes 800,000 mothers into criminals, that law is no law any more!’²⁵³ was repeated in the film version, and became a slogan in the reproductive rights movement. What is interesting about this passage is the unintended irony of the use of ‘mother’; even in a situation that quite patently does not involve motherhood, it was in the name of a mother that Wolf rallied indignation. The film version of *Cyankali* put an even greater stress on a thwarted maternity, both in its depiction of Hete and in the overall narrative arc. Also significant in this respect was the emphasis placed on medical authority in the film. As Usborne points out, the film had much in common with other cultural representations of abortion in that it presented the non-medical abortion provider, the ‘wise woman’, as alien, uncouth, and dangerous. Her depiction in the film thus reflected broader images associating wise women with criminality, and especially with sexual deviance and prostitution.²⁵⁴ This connection was cemented in the film when Hete procures the means for her home abortion behind a newspaper stall selling erotica; a masculinised woman depicted buying a copy of the lesbian magazine *Die Freundin* suggests sexual deviance, but also a rather confused gender politics. The final scene, in which Hete lies dying, even rehabilitates the medical establishment, presenting the doctors as helplessly constrained by the law rather than, as the opposition of the DÄVB to legal change would suggest, as agents in maintaining it.

Wolf himself shared the view of many on the left that film had a powerful potential for conveying political meaning: ‘[i]t is precisely with *film* that it is most clearly evident today, to what extent *art is a weapon*’. This political film was very different from the profit-driven kitsch churned out by Hugenberg’s Ufa that ‘clouds the mind and stupefies the people!’²⁵⁵ The film version of *Cyankali* was produced just as sound film was beginning to take hold, and it used these possibilities in an interesting way. The bulk of the film was silent, but the end portion, when the police come to question and arrest Hete as she dies, was filmed with sound. This serves to heighten the didactic elements of the play, allowing us to hear Paul’s impassioned plea against the law that criminalises 800,000 women and Hete’s last words in which she asks for help not

252 Durus, ‘“Gruppe Junger Schauspieler” gegen den Paragraphen 218’, in Wolf and Hammer 1978, p. 134.

253 *Cyankali*, in Wolf and Hammer 1978, p. 68.

254 Usborne 2007, pp. 37–38.

255 ‘Kunst ist Waffe!’, in Wolf and Hammer 1978, p. 108.

just for herself, but for the ten thousand who die every year. Film elements were also incorporated into Piscator's theatrical staging of the play, along with newspaper headlines and other slogans.

These multi-media techniques were also used in another well-known play on abortion mounted shortly after *Cyankali* – Carl Credé's *§218: Tortured People* (*§218: Gequälte Menschen*), which was staged as *§218: Women in Need* (*§218: Frauen in Not*) in a number of cities in 1930. The run culminated with Piscator producing the play in Berlin's Wallner Theatre, again using techniques of montage to integrate a variety of media to great effect.²⁵⁶ Like Wolf, Credé was a doctor, although politically he stood closer to the SPD. Credé had long been active on the abortion question, proclaiming that '[t]he main goal of many of my undertakings is to mobilise women for the sacred struggle for the abolition of §218'.²⁵⁷ Critics on the left were less than kind about his efforts in *§218*. Herbert Jhering argued that the play lacked political heft. 'Aestheticised misery without an argument [*Elendsmalerei ohne Beweis*], excruciating, distracting to the nerves, with the intention but without the strength of a will for change'.²⁵⁸ For Jhering and others, however, the weaknesses in the play itself were overcome by Piscator's direction. *§218* proved to be one of Piscator's great successes, with Jhering describing it as a *Lehrstück* or learning play, a term generally associated with Brecht's work from these years. The communist critic Durus had a similar assessment to Jhering of both the original and its reworking: 'Piscator has made a revolutionary performance out of Credé's original humanitarian-sentimental poverty piece'.²⁵⁹ The use of amateur actors was one of several elements that turned the play into more of an agitprop piece, and brought its politics closer to the KPD.

Credé's play was one of many cultural interventions that made explicit the importance of the abortion question for the struggle against fascism. As Durus noted in his review, one of the key characters in the play was a fascistic male pensioner (*Unfallrentner*, or someone collecting a pension due to an accident) who denounces the Noltes, the main family in the story, for contravening §218. The play thus highlights the role played by a petty and vindictive anti-abortion politics in radical right mobilisation. In developing this critique, though, the play tends to downplay gender. As with *Cyankali*, the narrative is structured around the figures of the suffering woman and the dangerous lay abortion provider, with the KPD serving as the vehicle for resistance to the abortion

256 Theesfeld 2006, p. 211.

257 Credé 1929, p. 201.

258 '§218', in Jhering 1987, p. 422.

259 Durus, 'Eine wichtige Aufführung der dritten Piscator-Bühne: Carl Credé: 'Paragraph 218'', in Hoffmann 1980, I, p. 153.

law.²⁶⁰ Women are thus passive, their bodies the ground on which political contestations took place rather than active agents in the anti-§218 struggle. By framing the KPD as saviour, the Party's own ambivalent gendered politics is left unaddressed, and again limited their ability to mobilise amongst women. Indeed, for all that Nazi and other right-wing ideologies drew on reactionary conceptions of gender, their stress on women as mothers arguably granted them an active social role often denied on the left, where questions of gender were subordinated to the class struggle.

As noted earlier, the image of passive and suffering mothers did not adequately reflect the experience of working-class women themselves for whom, as Osborne argues on the basis of her reconstruction from court records and other sources, 'abortion was only one of many strategies to maintain the general well-being of a woman and her family'.²⁶¹ The slogan 'Women in Need' ('Frauen in Not') around which much of the movement mobilised reflected the reductive sense of women's experiences. This is evident in an art show of the same name mounted in Berlin in 1931 that featured works by Käthe Kollwitz, the popular artist Heinrich Zille, whose sketches had inspired the 'Zille-films' discussed in the previous two chapters, and a number of others. *Eulenspiegel* dedicated a special issue to the show (and readers of the paper received a discounted entry fee), which again highlighted the class differences between working- and middle-class women. The front cover featured a drawing by Elfriede Thurner of an emaciated mother and child with enormous eyes staring sadly out at the reader, a classic 'woman in need' depiction (Ill. 33). An article by Durus contrasted the exhibition with another mainstream show running at the same time entitled 'Images of Women of our Time', which offered depictions of 'ladies of leisure' ('Luxusweibchen').²⁶² Rather than these 'fantasy women', the women of 'Frauen in Not' were real women rooted in existing class society, and in the show '[t]he everyday life of reportage becomes art'.²⁶³

Yet critics like Durus were also likely to endorse their own 'fantasy women', passively suffering mothers and wives. Even KPD women leaders, who tended

260 Grossmann 1995, pp. 85–86; Schneider 1975, pp. 93–96. Schneider stresses the anti-fascist dimensions of the novel.

261 Osborne 2007, p. 161.

262 The use of 'Weibchen' renders the description rather more dismissive and misogynist as it denotes female animals not people.

263 Durus 1931c, p. 159. This article was the twentieth installment of a series on 'proletarian artists', in this case dedicated to the theme 'women in need', unlike the bulk of the series which focused on individual artists.



ILLUSTRATION 33 *Elfriede Thurner, front cover, Eulenspiegel, 1931, 4, 10. Digital Image.*

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to develop more critical perspectives, endorsed such maternalist ideologies. In 1933 Martha Arendsee, one of the most prominent Party deputies around women's issues, thus astutely noted the extent to which the right had mobilised through 'morality associations' (*Sittlichkeitsvereine*), for example, that were profoundly gendered. 'The favoured method of the enemies of the proletariat is to style themselves as "saviours of the family" or "guardians of motherhood against bolshevism"'. But, she went on, '[t]hey know: the struggle around the child and the happiness of motherhood represent the most significant services for a woman'.²⁶⁴ Rather than a critique of maternal ideologies, then, Arendsee's argument tends to replicate them. The Party, she stresses, needs to become better in addressing women. 'The women of the working people want to be mothers. *This right to motherhood can only be secured for them by communism*'.²⁶⁵ While KPD activists were leery of endorsing what they saw as bourgeois 'rights' in agitating for the decriminalisation of abortion, the 'right to motherhood' remained uncontroversial.

Such perspectives remained dominant within the KPD, but alternatives did emerge in which maternity was not simply presented as the dominant form of femininity. One famous example was Alice Lex-Nerlinger's *Paragraph 218*, which was displayed in the 'Frauen in Not' exhibition, and was subsequently seized by police. As we saw earlier, Durus had commended this piece as one of the few positive examples of montage, spurred no doubt in part by the fact that Lex-Nerlinger had joined the KPD in 1928. She had been active with the worker-photographer movement, as well as participating in events like the *Film und Foto* show in Stuttgart mentioned in the last chapter. *Paragraph 218* depicts women through maternity, with a pregnant figure dominating the background of the image, but in the foreground we see a woman pushing over a cross on which '§218' is inscribed. The work thus stresses the active role of women in the struggle, producing a more dynamic sense of the relationships between gender, class, and, in the form of the cross, religion.²⁶⁶

One of the most notable works advocating the decriminalisation of abortion while challenging the dominant gendered narratives within the KPD was the film *Kuhle Wampe*, which was remarkable especially for the matter of fact way in which it presented the issue. This was true despite the fact that abortion received only relatively oblique references in its final version. As I discussed earlier, the film attracted the attention of the censors, whose objections to the

264 Arendsee 1981, p. 114.

265 Arendsee 1981, p. 117.

266 Epp Buller 2005. See also Atina Grossman's early work on abortion in the Weimar period in which the contrast between Lex-Nerlinger's activist depiction is contrasted with Kollwitz's more passive approach (1978, pp. 120–21).

film were rooted not just in its politics, which they argued endangered public safety and order,²⁶⁷ but also for its depiction of abortion. Indeed, many of the cuts they demanded before allowing the film's release involved scenes referring directly to §218, as well as a scene in which the relative costs of medical and non-medical abortions were discussed, and a scene depicting a car bearing an ad for condoms.²⁶⁸ These cuts muted the theme of reproductive politics, but it remained central to the unfolding of the film, especially its depiction of the difficulties and dangers of procuring abortions under conditions of criminalisation.

The film linked access to abortion directly to the broader plight of the working class, a connection that the censors clearly saw as well, and it did so without a reductive maternalism. Anni, the lead character, was presented primarily through her wage labour, while the film also linked the realms of production and reproduction by juxtaposing the search for an abortion with the search for employment. The complex interconnections between the two spheres was directly evident in a stunning montage sequence in which images of babies and children, advertisements for soap and other children's products, and shots of the offices of the midwife and doctor were interspersed with references to Anni's brother's suicide, which had been prompted by his inability to find work. The montage gives a disturbing evocation of Anni's inner turmoil, but rather than simply reflecting an inner psychological state (the trauma that so many critics ascribed to abortion itself), the sequence makes clear that this trauma was wholly the product of the social conditions of working-class child-bearing and rearing. As Ursula von Keitz argues, the depiction of advertising and consumer culture in the montage cements the film's critical analysis of the reproductive logic of capital by juxtaposing the social consequences of childbirth with the dreamworld of an individualised and commercialised pronatalist ideology.²⁶⁹

Despite the intervention of the censors, then, the film clearly presented an anti-§218 perspective. This position would have been obvious to viewers in a scene set during Anni's engagement party. Here we encounter her drunken uncle Otto, the corpulent embodiment of petit-bourgeois dissolution, who is

267 For the censors' decision, see 'Erstes Verbot des Films', in Kühn, Tümmeler, and Wimmer 1975, II, pp. 129–37. For discussions of the censorship in relation to the film, see Birgel 2009; Keitz 2005b, pp. 354–59. Another interesting enforced cut was a scene of naked bathers of the communist nudist movement. What especially exercised the censors was the fact that this scene included a church steeple in the background as well as the sound of church bells; the political implications of this contrast were unacceptable.

268 'Freigabe des Films', in Kühn, Tümmeler, and Wimmer 1975, II, pp. 156–58.

269 Keitz 2005a, pp. 365–67.

insisting on taking a late-night swim. His wife tries to dissuade him, but he responds: '[m]y body belongs to me [*Mein Körper gehört mir*]'. On the surface, this is a statement of petit-bourgeois truculence, an individualistic (and intoxicated) claim to personal satisfaction against any collective interest. As viewers would have recognised, however, uncle Otto's stubborn claim in fact mimicked the prominent slogan of the abortion rights movement, 'your body belongs to you [*dein Körper gehört dir*]'. The latter, however, implied a very different conception of bodily autonomy than the reactionary possessive individualism invoked by uncle Otto. In this light, Anni's decision to have an abortion is counter-posed directly to the patriarchal and family-oriented values of her apolitical family, reflecting instead the class-conscious values of her communist friends, who in turn take up a collection to support her.

The film thus presents abortion as the site at which the repressive nature of the bourgeois family, the locus of capitalist relations of reproduction, could be challenged. Especially important in this respect is that Anni's matter of fact decision to have an abortion does not lead to any negative legal or health consequences, as was so often the case even in anti-§218 works. She is neither passive nor a victim, and is also not presented simply as a potential mother. The film's tone thus matches much more closely the perspective held, as we have seen, by most working-class women. *Kuhle Wampe*'s concern with the politics of reproduction has generally been ignored or downplayed in Marxist commentary, but it is here that the film's radical emancipatory cultural politics receives its most important articulation. In recognising Anni as both a worker and as an active agent of her own reproductive decisions, *Kuhle Wampe* addressed two of the central loci of reactionary mobilisation: the renewed campaign against 'double-earners' and the assertion of a maternalist ideology. In the process, the film offered an implicit challenge to the KPD's increasingly closed conception of politics that, with some exceptions, offered an inadequate response to the right on these grounds. By bringing the politics of reproduction into the centre of the narrative, the film thus offered a window into an alternative imagining of the politics of the *Volkskörper* that went beyond the reductive militancy of the KPD.

6.6 In the Shadow of Fascism: Brecht, the Left, and the End of the Weimar Republic

As we saw in the second chapter, the First World War involved a massive upsurge in women's mobilisation that went unmatched until the struggles over the criminalisation of abortion at the end of the Weimar period. In both cases

these movements centred on the politics of social reproduction, responding to situations of growing hardship and want with a challenge to the ways in which interlocking spheres of labour propagated forms of oppression and a hierarchical social order. As Elisabeth Domansky argued, however, the experience of the War had reoriented the gendered social order, with a shift from a division between public and private spheres to one configured around the model of two fronts – the fighting and the home front.²⁷⁰ This shift was certainly evident in the politics of the later Weimar years, the fight for the street reflecting a masculinised politics that tended to marginalise the questions of social reproduction foregrounded in women's struggles. I have argued in this chapter that this marginalisation was an important source of the weakness of the left, a marker of the extent to which the counter-revolutionary movements of the previous decade or more had moved the political centre of gravity to the right. The left's inadequate responses were not the primary cause of this shift, but certainly contributed in ceding strategically crucial ground to the right.

The right's success was due to a significant degree to their mobilisation of ideas of the *Volkskörper*. The development of increasingly repressive practices of social hygiene, racial hygiene, and eugenics not only coopted the SPD to a significant degree, but also represented a danger that was not adequately recognised in the KPD's turn to the social fascist perspective. The latter approach was based on a tendency that had emerged often in KPD politics in which the Party's militant will was given priority over a broad mobilisation of the working class. This had been the case in earlier disastrous adventures like the March Action, and returned here with the fundamental misreading of the balance of forces in late Weimar society. This perspective, the product to a significant degree of the Stalinisation of the Party, promoted a masculinist and divisive Party culture in which, as we saw in the introduction to the book, those who challenged Party positions were purged or disciplined, as was the case with the Brandler-Thalheimer opposition or that of Heinz Neumann. It was here, as I have argued in this chapter, that the cultural sphere took on a much greater prominence in terms of remaining more open to divergent political perspectives, and in keeping open the possibility for forging political links beyond the confines of the Party. Thus, we find the development of projects like a left film association that, as the *AIZ* editor Franz Höllering put it, could build a '[u]nited front from Heinrich Mann to Piscator!'²⁷¹ Centred on the journal *Film und Volk*, this project thus sought to develop precisely those coalitions rejected under the social fascism approach. Even here, though, such political

²⁷⁰ Domansky 1996. I looked at her argument in more detail in the second chapter.

²⁷¹ Höllering 1928c, p. 4.

heterogeneity was discouraged, with Höllering soon replaced as editor of *Film und Volk* by Erich Lange. The tone of the journal quickly changed, with the KPD's familiar street-fighting rhetoric returning in descriptions of the film association as a 'fighting organisation' searching for people to 'fill our ranks as active fighters'.²⁷² 'We don't want to be a consumer organisation', a commentary in the next issue stressed, 'but a fighting organisation'.²⁷³

One of the more trenchant critiques of the KPD line came from the playwright Ernst Toller. As we saw in earlier chapters, Toller had developed a subtle analysis of the embodied dimensions of cultural and political struggles that recognised the challenge posed by fascism's desire for an integrated, metal-hard masculine body and a social order purged of degeneracy. It is not surprising then, that Toller refused to go along with the social fascist arguments that presented Nazism as a fleeting threat or a sign that a proletarian revolution was imminent. Such a view, he argued, ignored completely the balance of forces. In October 1930 he looked back on 1918–19 as a period in which revolutionary movements had failed, undone by a lack of insight and experience, but in which they had nevertheless been in the ascendancy. This had changed dramatically by the late 1920s with the rise of Hitler and the weakening of the left's base. Toller thus warned against any complacency as to the dangers posed by this new configuration.

The working class, in 1918 fundamentally united, is fragmented and, despite its numerical organisational strength, not powerful enough. The republic has forgotten everything and learned nothing. The reaction has forgotten nothing and learned everything. . . . We stand before a period of reactionary rule. No one should think that the fascist period, however moderate or devious, will be a short transitional period. The revolutionary, socialist, republican energy that the system will destroy will not be rebuilt for many years.²⁷⁴

Not only should the left not delude itself about its strength or cling to the notion that Hitler's rise would be fleeting, it should beware of assuming it could challenge fascism on its own terms. 'It makes no sense to fight the Hitler

²⁷² Erich Lange 1928, p. 12.

²⁷³ Jan 1929, p. 14.

²⁷⁴ Toller 1930, p. 538. Toller quotes this passage from a speech he gave in February 1929 at a memorial put on by the League for Human Rights in memory of the murder of Kurt Eisner.

movement by taking over its chauvinist concepts'.²⁷⁵ Taking direct aim at the social fascist idea, Toller thus proclaimed:

It is time to dispel dangerous illusions. Not only democrats, also socialists and communists tend to feel one should let Hitler rule; then one would most easily see him ruin himself. But they forget that the Nazi party is defined by its will to power and the use of power. They will be glad to achieve power democratically, but they will never surrender it at the behest of democracy. . . . If nothing happens [to avert it] we are on the verge of a period of European fascism, a period of the temporary extinction of political and spiritual freedom, whose end will only come in the train of ghastly, bloody struggles and wars.

We are writing on New Year's Eve, 1931. This time the phrase is [literally] true: it is one minute before midnight.²⁷⁶

Given this situation, he argued, the only possible form of resistance was a united front of all the left parties, movements, and trade unions.

What is important to note about Toller's argument is that he refused both the 'totalitarian' model that equated the radicalism of the left and the right, and the KPD's voluntarist notion of revolution. This returns us to the arguments against the concept of totalitarianism I developed in the introduction to the book. There I contended that ideas of totalitarianism eschewed a meaningful analysis of relations of power, replacing such an analysis with a focus on rhetorical similarities. Toller's argument does the opposite, stressing the profound shifts in social power that underlay the political changes taking place in the later Weimar years. If the Republic had been founded on the violent suppression of a revolutionary left, a suppression in which the radical right had played a central role, by the early 1930s the balance of forces meant that the fascist right had now gained a much greater autonomy from the bourgeois forces that had enabled their earlier action. An understanding of this complex dynamic is largely absent from the totalitarian perspective. Ricardo Bavaj's argument, which I touched on in the introduction to the book, offers a good indication of the analytical problems that result. Bavaj contends (rather absurdly) that it was in fact the left's rhetorical and street-based opposition to republican democracy that should be held responsible for the growth of the *anti-Bolshevism* which Hitler was then able to mobilise.²⁷⁷ In this circular view

²⁷⁵ Toller 1930, p. 539.

²⁷⁶ Ibid. Parts of these translations are borrowed from Ossar 1980, pp. 17–18.

²⁷⁷ Bavaj 2005, pp. 494–97.

it is the left, and not the powerful social actors that *actually* colluded with the radical right, which bears the responsibility for the rise of fascism.

In thinking through the logic of fascist mobilisation, the politics of degeneration becomes crucial, not only in terms of how Nazis leveraged this politics, but more importantly in terms of the ways in which the politics of degeneration shaped the social field, opening up the space within which the Nazis could operate. The lengthy analyses in this book of the various social groups produced as degenerate (the primitive, the insane, the prostitute, the cripple, etc.), and also the analyses of the mobilisations by those named as degenerate *against* their marginalisation, has shown the extent to which the Weimar republican order was constantly being formed and reformed through these dynamics. The production of the *Volkskörper* involved a complex set of practices, drawing together relations of production and social reproduction, that worked to purge the social body of its unruly, disruptive elements, thereby disciplining the body politic against what Habermas, as we saw in the introduction, condemned as 'the pressure of the street'.²⁷⁸

Against the backdrop of the broader explorations developed in the book, I have developed an analysis of the ways in which, by the later Weimar years, the left's room for manoeuvre had been gradually reduced, its mobilising power contained. In those later years, I have argued, it was in the cultural sphere that we can find the echoes of an emancipatory politics that recognised the changing dynamics and relations of power. While often on the defensive, at times we also find projects able to challenge the growing power of the radical right, and reactivate revolutionary energies that had been suppressed. One of the key figures in this respect was Bertolt Brecht. In this chapter I have explored aspects of his radical cultural praxis, using his work to open a route into a much broader world of worker culture. Brecht himself drew together many of the cultural approaches and political experiences of the Weimar period, from agitprop to Bloody May, and from epic theatre to the struggle for the decriminalisation of abortion. Brecht sought to create a theatre not only of social and political, but of bodily and subjective, transformation. In this respect he was working on the terrain of the *Volkskörper*, offering challenges to the dominant ways in which individual and social bodies were (re)produced.

In Brecht's play *The Mother* we can find one final expression of the emancipatory culture that emerged in the bleak final years of the Weimar period. He wrote the play in the aftermath of the radicalising experience of Bloody May in 1929 and his subsequent embrace of communism.²⁷⁹ In the years that fol-

²⁷⁸ Habermas 1989, p. 132.

²⁷⁹ Willett 1988, p. 127.

lowed he produced some of his most didactic political works: the *Lehrstücke*, or learning plays. The longest of these (which is often not included in the category of *Lehrstück* as a result) was his play *The Mother*. The play referenced the police brutality evident in Bloody May along with a number of other pressing issues, including wage cuts, layoffs, and strikes. But, since it was based on Gorky's novel of the same name and set in Russia, Brecht could avoid crossing the censors who so often targeted left productions on the grounds of attacking the German state.²⁸⁰

Brecht's *The Mother* eschewed the pathos of Gorky's original, bringing the techniques of the epic theatre to bear on the production. It was first staged by the troupe 'Gruppe Junger Schauspieler' on 16 January 1932, with Helene Weigel as the Mother and Ernst Busch, the worker-theatre actor who had also appeared in *Kuhle Wampe*, as her son. The initial run of the play used the innovations of the proletarian theatre, including a staging system that enabled quick scene changes as well as projections of both text and images on a backdrop. These were integral to Brecht's aesthetic. As he argued in the notes to the play,

[t]he projections are by no means a mere mechanical auxiliary in the sense of a 'visual aid', and offer no crib sheet for the lazy. They have no intention of assisting the spectator but aim rather to oppose him; they frustrate his total empathy and interrupt his mechanical assent. They render the EFFECT INDIRECT. In this fashion they are an organic part of the work of art.²⁸¹

Here again we see the estrangement effect that Brecht argued was central to a radical theatre.

The episodic structure of the play, which traced the coming to political consciousness of Pelagea Vlassova, the mother of the title, likewise reflected the structure of epic theatre. Her son Pavel is involved with a group of young communists, but he dismisses the idea that his old mother could participate

²⁸⁰ Bradley 2006, pp. 53–54. There were issues when the play was run in the working-class Moabit district as the police attempted to block the production. For the *Rote Fahne*, this was another instance of the growing censorship in which '[t]he ruling class forbids what is dangerous to it', a clear example of the extent to which the vaunted bourgeois freedom of speech and conscience was increasingly a sham (see 'Mit Thälmann gegen Unterdrückung der Geistesfreiheit', in Hoffmann 1980, 1, p. 421).

²⁸¹ 'Brecht's Notes to *The Mother*', in Brecht 1965, p. 134.

in the struggle, telling his comrades that ‘she couldn’t be of use in any case’.²⁸² When the police ransack their apartment looking for political leaflets, Vlassova proves him wrong by going out to distribute them instead of her son, this first political act prompted solely by a maternal desire to protect her son from arrest; indeed, she is illiterate and cannot even read the pamphlets. While handing out leaflets she joins a peaceful demonstration that is attacked by police who shoot down a worker carrying the red flag. Vlassova, who had been unconvinced by her son’s claims that the police and factory owners acted in concert to repress workers, picks up the flag and marches, thus entering into the communist movement. Here especially we see the echoes of Bloody May and the radicalising impact of police violence.

Vlassova’s political awakening, shaped in part by the arrest of her son, leads her to take on a growing role in the movement. Much of her work involves education, engaging not only with workers, but also with a number of others representing classes or class fractions who might be brought into the revolutionary movement. One is a teacher who, under Vlassova’s influence, eventually takes down his picture of the Tsar, but finds it difficult to let go of his petty-bourgeois beliefs. He represents the white-collar worker who, as I discussed in earlier chapters, played an important role in shaping the class dynamics of Weimar society. The peasants are another group, and Vlassova succeeds in bringing some to the revolutionary side. Her most important target, though, is women, and it is here that the play’s significance is greatest, especially in terms of my argument in the book. Vlassova’s son Pavel is shot going to Finland, and women come to her to offer condolences. These women embody reactionary, religious, and anti-rational thinking, repeatedly trying to convince her that God’s justice transcends the human. Vlassova rejects their prayers and offers of the Bible, proclaiming the communist answer. ‘What we say is this: the fate of man is man.’²⁸³

The key moment in the play comes with the outbreak of war in 1914. Here again the German parallels are clear – scenes in the play depicting patriotic crowds sending the soldiers off to war echo those that we saw in the second chapter, and express the dominant gendered logic of the two fronts. Vlassova will have none of this, and she joins the crowd shouting ‘[d]own with the war! Long live the revolution!’²⁸⁴ The police beat her in response, but she goes on proclaiming the international solidarity of the working class in a later scene, bringing her revolutionary message to women who are donating their copper

282 Brecht 1965, p. 41.

283 Brecht 1965, p. 114.

284 Brecht 1965, p. 119.

pots to the War effort. Some turn on her, denouncing her as a Bolshevik. She replies that they are murderers for sacrificing their young. 'You should have the wombs torn out of you. They should wither and you turn sterile, just as you stand there.'²⁸⁵ Here echoes of the birth strike promoted before the War return, Brecht stressing the centrality of reproduction to both capitalism and the working-class struggle. Most of the women ignore her, but one housemaid joins and the play ends as they walk together with a red flag at the head of a demonstration. *The Mother* thus brings us back to one of the arguments made in the second chapter, the importance of women's mobilisations during the War. The play remembers these movements, representing one of the few instances in Weimar culture when they were presented as central to the development of the revolutionary movement. In Germany, of course, the revolution was not successful, but by setting the play in Russia Brecht is able to hold open the possibility of ultimate victory.

While some communist critics were uneasy at what they saw as a critical commentary on the Russian revolution,²⁸⁶ the dominant response to Brecht's play was positive. Reviewing it in *Rote Fahne* in 1932, Paul Brand argued that Brecht had come a long way with this play and his other recent work, becoming the key exponent of a Marxist and proletarian theatre.

This is a new Bert Brecht. He has fled from the desert of the bourgeois theatre business. He now fights with the revolutionary working class. He hasn't yet thrown off all of the shackles that previously held him. He will do so. He *must* do so.²⁸⁷

Brand, like many reviewers, however, said little of the central theme in the play: the coming to consciousness of a *mother*. Alfred Polgar was one who did pick up on this dimension in his review in *Die Weltbühne*.

The play demonstrates clearly how an apolitical mother, who is only a mother, becomes politicised to the point that she ceases to be a mother.

One might also put it differently: to the point where she becomes in a larger and more universal human sense a mother.²⁸⁸

²⁸⁵ Brecht 1965, p. 128.

²⁸⁶ Bradley 2006, pp. 34–35.

²⁸⁷ Paul Brand, 'Brechts Lehrstück ein großer Erfolg' in Fetting 1987, 2, p. 569.

²⁸⁸ Polgar 1932, p. 138.

In part inadvertently, Polgar touches on the central question in the play, and indeed a central question with which I have grappled in this book. His dual formulation expresses succinctly the dilemmas of the politics of embodiment in the play, and in radical left politics in Weimar more generally. Brecht himself highlighted this aspect of the play in his notes. Discussing the scene in which the mother hands out leaflets by duping a factory guard, he comments: '[s]he awakens in the Guard a sympathy which ends by disarming him. Thus she makes excellent use of her intimate knowledge of the old type of mother love which is exhausted; she is herself the example of a new and effective variety'.²⁸⁹ The figure of the mother thus embodies both the reactionary and unchanging false consciousness of a moribund working class, and the new revolutionary consciousness coming into being. Vlassova performs the old maternal role at the beginning of the play in feeding and caring for Pavel; in ceasing to perform this labour (a development that Pavel laments, demonstrating the tenacious hold of old forms of life in the working-class movement) she takes on the revolutionary mantle. What is telling especially in Polgar's first formulation, however, is that the transformation involves leaving the mother's body behind. Indeed, this is a persistent tendency in the play; the embodied contexts of women's everyday life represents that which needs to be transcended, while communist consciousness is generated in the politics of the street.

The Mother's production of the gendered body is profoundly ambivalent in this respect. Vlassova's refusal to perform domestic labour for Pavel and her curse on the wombs of the patriotic women foreground the centrality of questions of gender and reproduction to the class struggle. Brecht's use of a female lead, in this and other plays, brings the importance of women's mobilisation into the heart of his reading of revolution. This core of the play was highlighted by Benjamin in his review, which drew out Brecht's focus on the importance of the family and reproduction to capitalism: 'the mother, among all family members, is the most unequivocally determined as to her social function: she produces the next generation. The question raised by Brecht's play is: Can this social function become a revolutionary one, and how?'²⁹⁰ This was a crucial question in light of the campaigns against the 'double-earner' and the broader anti-feminist politics in which the left all too often participated. Such approaches tended instead to re-naturalise the reproductive function, thereby acting directly *against* the possibility of turning its social function into a revolutionary one. Brecht, Benjamin argued in 1932, recognised in Vlassova

289 'Brecht's notes to *The Mother*', in Brecht 1965, p. 140.

290 'A Family Drama in the Epic Theater', in Benjamin 1999b, p. 558.

someone who is doubly exploited: first, as a member of the working class, and, second, as a woman and mother. The doubly exploited childbearer represents the exploited in their most extreme oppression. If mothers are revolutionized, there is nothing left to revolutionize.²⁹¹

As I have argued throughout the book, this was a perspective resisted in many ways on the left, breaking out intermittently only to be repressed again. We can find traces of this repression in the tendency I have noted in *The Mother* to read revolutionary activity in part as a *flight from* reproductive labour and its implied bodily commitments. The street, so central to late Weimar communist organising, is reconfigured by the mother's presence, but remains the privileged locus of political action. Benjamin is more generous in his reading of the play, however, arguing that the reversal of the roles of mother and son de-naturalises gendered relations, thereby generating a revolutionary transformation of consciousness that goes to the root of repressive social relations of production and reproduction. 'The son must cut bread while the mother, who is illiterate, works the printing press; the necessity of life no longer catalogues people according to their sex'.²⁹² This is the revolutionary dialectical moment in the play that echoes Benjamin's own conception of revolution as a rupture in the temporal continuum, and that, he says, is captured in the famous lines of Vlassova's final speech. 'The dialectic has no need of a far distance shrouded in mist. It is at home within the four walls of praxis, and it stands on the threshold of the moment to speak the closing words of the play: '[a]nd "Never" becomes, "Before the day is out!"'²⁹³ Here we have a second temporal injunction to juxtapose to Toller's warning from 1931 that we saw earlier. The imminent fascist danger, he proclaimed, signals that 'it is one minute before midnight'. Between these two moments, Toller's pessimistic sounding of the alarm at the imminence of fascist rule and Brecht's revolutionary optimism of the will, stretches the history of the Weimar period.

291 'A Family Drama in the Epic Theater', in Benjamin 1999b, pp. 558–59.

292 'A Family Drama in the Epic Theater', in Benjamin 1999b, p. 561.

293 'A Family Drama in the Epic Theater', in Benjamin 1999b, pp. 561–62. The full speech, with an alternate translation of the final line, reads as follows. 'If you still live, never say: Never! What looks certain is not certain. The way things are will not last. When the ruling class has spoken, the ruled shall raise their voices. Who dares say: Never? Who's to blame where oppression rules? We are. Those beaten down shall rise up tall! Whoever is lost, fights back! Who can restrain the man who sees his situation? The victims of today will be victors of tomorrow and Never is changed into Today' (Brecht 1965, p. 131).

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